

Aide-de-Camp's Library



सत्यमेव जयते

Rashtrapati Bhavan
New Delhi

Accn. No.

1200

Call No.

VIII (C) - M

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
NEW DELHI.



Aide-de-Camp's Library

EXILE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE STORY OF EDEN

URIAH THE HITTITE

MAFOOTA

TROPICAL TALES

EXILE

AN OUTPOST OF EMPIRE
BY DOLF WYLLARDE

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.
ADELPHI TERRACE

First published in 1916

[All rights reserved]

CHAPTER I

“ O, eyes on eyes ! O voices breaking still,
For the watchful will,
Into a kinder kindness that seemed due
From you to me and me to you !
And that hot-eyed, close-throated, blind regret
Of woman and man baulked and debarred the blue ! ”

W. E. HENLEY.

THE lamps had just been lit in the Club at Exile, and burned steadily despite the wind that always blows at night round the club-house—four candle-lamps to each bridge table. The game was popular, and there were so many tables that some of them were set out beyond the verandah, on the stretch of gravel between the club-house and the sea, where people had been having tea at sunset. Several ladies were still there, chatting to the accompaniment of the sea lapping beneath the stone wall, while the ships and smaller craft in Exile Harbour blossomed into electric stars and riding lights. The new dock-yard lay out of sight behind Fort Headland, and the old harbourage retained its picturesqueness. It was a pretty scene, with the artificial effect often produced in foreign stations such as Exile, and which reaches its perfection in the Yacht Club at Bombay. Indeed, Exile is not a little proud of the fact that its

tiny Club is like a miniature imitation of Bombay's, if you swept the latter bare of every blade of grass and green growing thing. Bombay does not share this view. It looks upon Exile as the abomination of desolation, and the Club as a pitiable effort to endure existence in the desert.

Nevertheless the Exile Club has surroundings that can be seen nowhere else in the world, and if they strike you aghast you will not call them theatrical at least. For up behind it tower the Rocks, in formation and colour like bronze icebergs piercing the sky, and across the harbourage is Banishment islet, behind which the sun sets. To see the sky torn with flame behind Banishment and each delicate point of its jagged teeth traced black upon the boiling clouds is a miracle of colour and form. And yet people in Exile may see it every night.

Five men were standing on the Club verandah, watching the bridge tables fill up and talking raw scandal. There is little else to do in Exile between the shifts of work, and after six months of the life people begin to take a savage delight in their neighbours' sins, knowing that they cannot hide their own. Exile is too blatant and too barren to hide anything, or perhaps it is the influence of the horrid formation of its craters that hardens and blasts humanity. The Rocks drive men mad. All day the sun beats upon them until they glare back and blind human eyesight, and at night the heat comes off them again like the breath of a furnace. That is why the bungalows are built high up the slopes, to get above the stench of it and into the upper air. The Club, being on the shore, depends upon the

wind that blows off the sea at night. But nobody goes there before six o'clock.

Of the five men talking scandal one was Tommy Bride, the port surgeon, who was booked to the Admiral's table so soon as he should appear; the man next to him was Richmond Hervey, Government engineer, the man who had made the existence of Fort Exile possible; and of the rest two were service men—Flag-Captain George Bunney, R.N., Chief of Staff, and Lieutenant Robert Yarrow, of the Marines—the last of the group being the Colonial Secretary, Rodney Haines.

"Everard is back, I hear," said Bride to Richmond Hervey. "The seraglios of Banishment don't seem to have held the usual attractions for him!"

"He was officially reported at Port Health," said Hervey grimly.

"Lies, my dear fellow; he was at Banishment, of course, with a filthy crowd of native women. The man's a swine in his tastes. I met his carriage once after dark in Reserve taking home a woman of the bazaars. Fact!"

"He isn't back yet though," said Rodney Haines, turning his head from a discussion on polo with Yarrow. "His sick leave is not up. The court begins to sit next month."

"Then we shall see more 'justice' done!" said Bunney with a laugh. "His Jewish friends want the monopoly of the silk trade (not to mention the Arab, Haßsan), and Azopardi & Co. have been doing a good deal in that line. They're in the way. You mark my words, Azopardi will be had up for larceny or something trivial, like Lestoc was, and he'll go."

"Lestoc's trial was for embezzlement, wasn't it?" corrected Haines. "Poor devil! that six months in an Arab prison put him out of the running for ever, I'm afraid."

"It's simply damnable!" burst out Yarrow of the Marines. He was the youngest of the group, and not yet cynical. "The man's using his position to openly mishandle justice. He made Lestoc a bankrupt, and then sent him to prison to get him out of the way. What on earth are the Home authorities doing? Why doesn't the Admiral interfere?"

"There's no jury except on criminal cases; the Chief Justice has it all in his own hands," said Haines curtly. "That's Exile. Oh, I grant you that there's an appeal to the Supreme Court of Bombay if it's a question of 10,000 rupees, or if he gives a sentence of two years' imprisonment; but a clever man can easily avoid that. When Yale went home on six months' leave and Everard was made Acting Chief Justice he had a few old scores to settle with the silk merchants. Well, he's settled them."

"But to simply trump up a charge and fling any one into prison who was in his way!—I should have thought it was impossible in this century."

"Not at all—in Exile. Besides, the Admiral's only just back from leave himself, and Everard's got the safe side of him at present," said Bunney. "Even if he knew, I don't quite see what he could do. No action at law can lie against an officer in the position of Acting Chief Justice; I ascertained that for my own satisfaction. A Petition to the Colonial

Secretary was the only thing, and it takes some time to get the Home authorities to move in the matter. In the meantime Mr. Everard goes gaily on his way."

"He's such a damned fine pleader!" said Dr. Bride cynically. "The man really has the gift of the gab; he can almost make you believe that black is white."

"When the Petition gets home there will be an investigation," said Haines. "And then Everard will crumble all to pieces. There is too much against him for a single man to carry—unless he were a Samson, which E. E. is not." He glanced half involuntarily at Hervey, as if some possibility struck him; and indeed the man was much more of a Samson than the Chief Justice. He was of a heavy build that might have been fleshy in a colder climate, but Exile does not leave superfluous fat on men's bones, and Richmond Hervey was gaunt rather than stout. His face was broad-browed and square-jawed, and the hair on the massive head was grey, though a great deal thicker than most of the younger men's. He was not prepossessing in appearance, and though the Colonial Secretary liked him much personally he wondered for the twentieth time that the man should be so notorious in his loves. There were few women in Exile whose names had not been rightly or wrongly coupled with his, and they seemed unable to resist him once he turned his attention to them. Why, at the present moment his affair with Mrs. Bride, who was sitting over there chatting to Mrs. Everard, was common talk. Mrs. Bride's eyes had not once strayed to the group on the verandah,

but Haines saw her hands twitch before the light darkened too much to betray her, and he knew that she was undergoing a kind of drilling that formed one of Hervey's amusements. . . .

There was something of the artist in Rodney Haines, and he divined the pains and penalties of his fellows with the fine sensitiveness of the artist—some of them, but not all. Little Mrs. Bride's trouble was an open book to him, too plain for indifference, but of Mrs. Everard, the woman talking to her, he knew nothing at all. There was little to be said of Mrs. Everard, save that she was far and away the best-looking woman in Exile, and that some dulness or impassibility in her safeguarded her from scandal. Her beauty was such an established fact that comment on it was stale, and she attracted no one, not even her own husband, who sought a change amongst the seraglios of Banishment islet! If anything were said of Mrs. Everard it was to pity her for being the wife of the Chief Justice; but it was generally agreed that she suffered less than any other woman would have done on account of her thick skin. Even Rodney Haines with his quick sympathies was not really thinking of her as he said "Poor Mrs. Everard! I wonder whether she realises the kind of skunk her husband is?"

"No, I don't think she does," said Bunney candidly. "She is not a quick-witted woman, and Everard has that gift of representing himself exactly as he wishes to appear. I'll bet you he has gulled his wife so that she thinks him in the right even over these judgments; and he'll gull the Home autho-

rities, too, if they come in personal contact with him. The man knows his own power. There is nothing that he is afraid of."

It was at this point that Richmond Hervey suddenly laughed. It was such a very unpleasant laugh that the other men all looked at him a little curiously, and Haines moved instinctively away. But he was not a pleasant person, and the extreme irony of his laughter was probably the outcome of some far from kindly joke known only to himself.

"If you talk of angels it is apt to make them flutter their wings," he said with a sneer. "Mrs. Everard is fluttering hers. She is undoubtedly one of our few angels and as unattractive as angels usually are. Here she comes—'unspotted from the world,' even in Exile!" He was not ironical now, despite his ill-nature. Indeed, he was conscious of a feeling of discomfort which always attacked him on Mrs. Everard's advent in his neighbourhood. She was the only woman in Exile who made him feel ashamed of himself in the most infinitesimal degree, and he hated her for it.

"She is leaving early to-day; she generally stays until Lady Stroud arrives," said George Bunney, following Mrs. Everard's progress across the gravel with critical eyes. "She's more like a goddess than an angel, Hervey. Great Scott, how she moves! It's royal."

"Goddess or angel, it's equally painful to look up to her!" said Hervey with a savage scorn of the truth.

"I hear that Lady Stroud has a niece of the Admiral's arriving to-day, and has gone down to the

pier to meet the boat. That is why she's late," said Yarrow. "Merryn's on duty, of course." Merryn was flag-lieutenant, and acted as A.D.C. to the Admiral. "Dashed nuisance. I wanted him to play polo this afternoon."

"Is Lady Stroud late, or is Mrs. Everard early in leaving?" said Dr. Bride idly. "It might be interesting to know, because if it's the latter it may mean that Everard is coming back to-night after all. I wonder if he has heard of the Petition!"

The slightness of the speculation marked the rate of interest in Exile,—even local interest. Mrs. Everard had almost reached the verandah while they spoke, and passed into the great arc of light, perfectly composed and un-selfconscious in her progress, though the talk fell short and the eyes of all the men near were focussed upon her. The light revealed every fold in her white gown and the rainbow silk of the scarf round her shoulders. She was rather above the average height for a woman, and built indeed as if for a pedestal. Her hair was like unburnished gold, dull and rich, but not metallic, and her skin had neither burnt nor faded for all the suns and the burning heat of Exile. It was a very white skin, pure and colourless, and her lips looked the redder by contrast since she had no roses in her cheeks. Her eyes were as nearly purple as human eyes can be, with a dash of brown in them that at times made them look wine-coloured, the brows and lashes faintly black. And all this without a touch of art to assist Nature! It was a mockery of all established customs in Exile, a challenge flung down to the laws of paint and powder.

She was looking straight at the group of gossips as she passed them, her steady eyes first falling on Dr. Bride and then focussing for a minute on Rodney Haines, so that her bow seemed made principally to him. He raised his hat with a quickness that seemed almost gratitude, and could have been equalled by no other man in the group. He had all the responsiveness of the artist. But Mrs. Everard's eyes glanced inclusively over Captain Bunney and Richmond Hervey and Mr. Yarrow before she lowered them with faint and general courtesy.

"She is certainly beautiful," said Rodney Haines, as sure of not being contradicted as he was that not one of the other men would be more interested than he was himself. One does not grow enthusiastic over the law of gravitation or the power of steam. Both are proven facts, and no longer discoveries. Mrs. Everard's beauty was of the same order.

She had passed with an unquickened step and an unheightened colour; nor was there the least hurry or betrayal in her of any emotion. Yet her heart was beating so heavily that it was actual physical pain, and the throbbing in her temples frightened her as it always did from a certain proximity. With one of those five men standing on the verandah she was in love, so vitally and imperatively that the passion of it swung her to the pendulum of its own force and threatened to have its way with her. All she could do was to hold her breath under the imperious power and to preserve her outward calm so far that not one of the group had as yet the faintest suspicion of it. So far, so far—but how much farther? It seemed to her a blind force hurrying her along a road whose

end she could not even guess, and she never knew whether it might not sweep her off her feet at any moment. To be in the same room with the man she loved caught her breath short as if the four walls were not wide enough for the spreading fire between them ; to pass him as she had passed him to-night, one of a careless group, oblivious of her, made her dizzy with the tingling sense of him ; and yet it had reached him so little that none of the five guessed it more than another, and each of them might have turned to his neighbour and said, " Is it you ?—is it that other ?—which of us *could* it be, when all seem impossible ? "

Not one of them turned, indeed, to cast a glance after her as her white figure vanished out of the light on the verandah round the corner of the club-house and was engulfed in shadow. As she emerged again on the entrance front that opened on the road she found herself facing a large motor car and two ladies coming into the Club. It was the Admiral's car, and Mrs. Everard stopped to shake hands with Lady Stroud.

" Leaving so soon, Mrs. Everard ? I hoped you would stay for bridge. May I introduce my husband's niece, Miss Playfair ? "

A very tall girl put out her hand a trifle readily, as if the sight of Mrs. Everard pleased her, and in the lights of the entrance they looked at each other curiously, as strangers do in Exile where most things are too familiar. Miss Playfair could not have been more than twenty, and her face had the opening look of a child or a flower. The large, candid eyes gave her the expression of one always asking a question, a

little puzzled with life, the wonder of inexperience. Yet she carried herself with the composure of the modern English girl who is trained out of awkwardness by mental and physical athletics. To Mrs. Everard she flashed out suddenly pathetic in the glitter of the Club lights, a young face seen for the first time—in Exile.

Lady Stroud turned back from the entrance as she was piloting Miss Playfair into the Club, and motioned her chauffeur to drive on.

“Are you looking for your car, Mrs. Everard? Mr. Merryn is there; he will find it for you. Mr. Merryn, do find Mrs. Everard’s car, and send our own out of the way!”

A young man stepped out of the darkness with two cloaks over his arm and the cumbered air of the A.D.C. Lieutenant Merryn was fond of the Admiral and Lady Stroud, and would have admitted that his lines had fallen in pleasant places to be attached to their staff; but his position, like all A.D.C.’s, was more than that of a poodle and less than that of a footman, since the former has no responsibility and the latter knows where his duties begin and end. Mrs. Everard stopped him as he was plunging into the darkness again and pointed across the road.

“I have not got the car; it is with my husband. I have been using one of Jalbhoy’s carriages; it is on the other side of the road.”

A minute later it drove up, the *abuggi* bringing the pair of ponies almost on to their haunches in the display of his zeal, and Mrs. Everard was helped in by the young man still standing in the road. Even as the carriage swung round she heard Miss Play-

fair's clear young voice, unconsciously audible in the hot night.

" Oh, Aunt Fanny ! What a beautiful woman ! Who is she ? "

Lady Stroud's reply was lost round the corner of the Club as they disappeared on to the verandah, Mr. Merryn bringing up the rear with the cloaks. Mrs. Everard leaned back upon the cushions of the open carriage and stared straight ahead into the hot black arc of the heavens, dazzling with stars. She was not thinking of the girl's impulsive tribute to her beauty, or of the flashing, cloudless sky, though she liked Exile best at this hour, when it seemed as if the heavens went back and back into limitless spaces of black velvet, and the planets swung and flickered from one horizon to the other. Her thoughts had reverted to that moment when she passed the group of men on the Club verandah—the proximity of one of them—the rest of the world blotted out by his indifferent personality. She need not struggle out here under the stars ; she could allow this wild love to have its way with her, and with limbs relaxed she let herself go, and felt the blood rush through her veins at fever heat, and leave her now dry and tingling, now moist and faint. The unsatisfied passion in her did indeed make her feverish, and her throat ached with unuttered sobs. It was these fits of physical pain that she dreaded so, the outcome of her mental craving. For she was not a sensualist ; only, her baulked instinct racked heart and nerves alike.

The Chief Justice's bungalow lay out beyond the fort, between the garrison buildings and Reserve.

All Service people lived in the fort, and most of the officials, but the road ran out along the base of the Rocks and through the new Cutting to Reserve, which is the business town of Exile. From the Cutting highway a private road turned up the face of the Rocks, climbing from ridge to ridge until it reached the bungalow, perched upon a small plateau that would hardly hold it and its narrow compound. Mrs. Everard looked lower than the stars as she was driven along the face of the Rocks to see their jagged outline piercing the night sky. She had a curious love for the Rocks that was half revulsion. They were so part of Exile that they seemed part of her life there also, and her life was summed up for her in this headlong love that had overtaken her. So she loved the Rocks as martyrs love the sharp edges of the cross they press into their flesh. It seemed to Claudia Everard that the teeth of the Rocks cut into her life also.

The *abuggi* lashed his team as they began to ascend, but he need not have done so, for the horses of Fort Exile are trained to gallop once they turn uphill. Mrs. Everard hated the sound of the blows, and called sharply to the man to let them walk if they wished. She spoke Arabic fluently after her two years in the station—more fluently than most of the men or any of the women. The driver dropped his whip back into its socket, but urged his horses instead with the wild cry of the place, “Hooor-cheel ! Hooor-cheel !” And so they tore, straining and leaping, to the Chief Justice’s bungalow.

Mrs. Everard alighted in the compound and walked into the house. The air was much fresher

here than it had been at the foot of the Rocks, but through all the bungalow sounded the whir of electric fans, and a cool draught greeted her as she entered the sitting-room. There was electric light here too, and from other bungalows spitted amongst the Rocks the jewelled electricity was already shining across the valleys and chasms. This was Richmond Hervey's work. He had brought the electric light to Government House and the garrison already, though the buildings on the shore had not yet had it installed.

The room which Mrs. Everard had entered was both dining-room and drawing-room, running from side to side of the bungalow. The dining-room portion was only divided off by pillars, and the same polished floor ran through and between them. The drawing-room was octagonal in shape, with jalousies that filled one end of it and were sheltered by a verandah. It was as good a room as might be found in Exile, and combined the advantages of air, seclusion from the glare of day, and immunity from dust. Even high up in the Rocks the whirling sand and dust seemed to settle upon everything, but there was little in the room to hold it—neither curtains, carpets, nor table covers. All the furniture was polished wood or basketwork; the sole upholstery was in the quantity of silk cushions. It struck any one entering as comfortable and even luxurious, but it shared a curious sense of something lacking with all houses in Exile, and strangers did not for a few minutes recognise that it was the absence of flowers and plants that struck them. As no green thing will grow on the Rocks without infinite care and labour,

there are neither flowers nor shrubs, except at Government House, where some goldmore trees and a few cacti are regarded as a necessary adjunct of royalty.

The restlessness of Mrs. Everard's trouble was still upon her. She walked to a small table and took up some "chits" that had arrived during the afternoon, looked at them, and threw them down without opening. Her heart still beat unpleasantly fast, and she had to struggle with a childish desire to cry. She wondered if it were always to be like this—if the maddening proximity of one man were to scatter her self-control to the winds and to make her feel as she felt to-night. It seemed to her that it could not go on, that it must either wear her out or she must wear it out. And yet it had gone on for nearly two years.—

She moved from the table to a mirror hanging on the wall, and taking the pins out of her hat, threw it on to a chair and looked at herself in the glass. She was very pale, as if the fierceness of her own feeling had burnt the life out of her, and her eyes looked nearly black with distended pupils. It struck her as horrible, and she shuddered at herself, pressing the dull gold hair back from her hot forehead to try and ease the pain in her temples. She was weary of her own self-restraint and the ceaseless watch she kept upon her nerves and senses.

"I am tired of saying 'No' to myself," she said to that revealing face in the glass. "I want to say one big 'Yes!' now. Let the whole world be nothing but 'Yes' to everything I want."

She had not heard a step in the house—certainly

no one had entered the room ; but suddenly out of the shadows of the verandah a voice said " Claudia ! " She paused, looking back from the mirror, her face settling into its mask of composure once more, and again the voice said " Claudia !—Claudia ! " with urgent insistence. Then she turned and walked forward deliberately to meet her husband.

He had come in through the open jalousies that led on to the verandah, and she remembered that he might have walked all round the bungalow that way—from his own room, or hers, or the servants' quarters. But there was a furtiveness in his manner that told her at once that he had not apprised the household of his presence and did not mean them to know. He turned his head from side to side, looking up and down the long bright rooms, and switched off some of the electric light, leaving none save that in the drawing-room near the jalousies.

" Come further back in the room, so that we cannot be seen from other houses," he said hurriedly, drawing her behind the lamps. " The place is as light as day ! "

" I did not expect you till next week, Edgar," Mrs. Everard said quietly. " Is anything wrong ? "

" Yes—the game's up," he said shortly, without any preamble. " There's only one thing can save me now."

" The game ! " repeated Claudia blankly. She looked at his narrow, handsome face, as if she saw it for the first time. Every betraying line of dissipation and self-indulgence was startlingly distinct under the pressure of some crisis that she could not

divine,—just as her own face in the mirror had been marked by her secret passion, she remembered. She had known for years that there were many things in his life about which she was to ask no questions, and had come to accept the position until they lived in the same house more remote from each other than if they had occupied two bungalows miles apart. Indeed, there were many men at the Club who knew more of Edgar Everard than she did, shared his coarse confidence, and could have followed his career with far more comprehension than his wife. Now it seemed on the instant that she was to become an intimate again, a friend in his confidence.

“You had better explain,” she said, leading the way back into the darkened drawing-room. “I know nothing as yet.”

“I have only half an hour,” he said, glancing hurriedly at his watch. The whole situation came back to her afterwards as having been breathless, words and explanations falling over each other into her consciousness, stunning her with revelation. “I have been in Banishment—I heard no news.”

“Banishment! Not to Health then? I sent all your correspondence to Health!”

“I know you did,—but Murgatroyd forwarded it. I was reported at Health, of course.” He seemed indifferent to her knowing any deception he had practised on her in the stress of the moment, yet his words told her more than their bare worth. Men did not go to Banishment for change of air as they went to Health. The place was notorious—a settlement of native bazaars and houses of the lowest class. He took it impatiently for granted

that she should know that, and if he had been asked he would have agreed that every one, his wife included, must be aware of his Arab house in Banishment. That she should be ignorant was a tiresome hindrance at this juncture of affairs.

Mrs. Everard put the revelation on one side with the same composure to consider the crux of the case. He recognised with relief that in a crisis she had a clear brain, and the capacity of a man for grasping essentials and letting side issues go.

"You had better tell me your exact difficulty, as we have so little time," she said. "You missed some important information through being in Banishment and not at Health. That I know. What is this information, and how does it affect you?"

For a minute he did not answer, and she saw him moisten his lips as if he had some difficulty in forming the words. She waited patiently, thinking that he was putting his thoughts in order and condensing the facts for her as he might have done in court. Then he spoke suddenly, with a bald statement of the case that seemed to strike her dumb.

"I wrote to Richmond Hervey after I went away, asking him to join us in the silk combine and threatening him with certain consequences if he did not. I thought I had him in a vice and that I could make my own terms. We wanted his name on the directorate—Hassan, and Jacobs, and I; it would have made everything safe. But Hassan wrote to me to Health to tell me that we had made a slip—it was madness to ask Hervey to come in—we had been misinformed. I never got his letter."

Now it was Mrs. Everard who was silent, but her silence was so imperative that he answered it.

"I know—the one man of all others I should not have tried it on. But I thought I had him tight—I tell you, I thought I had him tight!" He hurried the words, and raised his clenched hand in the air to show his meaning, as if he must force it on her understanding. Then his fingers relaxed and his hand fell on the table heavily. "The thing is done—Hervey holds that letter as evidence against me," he said.

She still looked at him in that appalled silence.

"It is no case in itself," he said; but his lips worked in a horrible manner, and his face grew gradually livid as he spoke. "No action at law can lie against me while I am in office. But I stated everything openly in that letter—I told him how I had cleared the way. If he published it and it got known in the bazaars, I could not show my face in the streets. I should ask for a police guard.—"

Then at last she spoke, below her breath, but as if she saw something that frightened her more than the menace of an Arab rising.

"Richmond Hervey—you threatened him! You must have been mad!"

"Not mad,—a gambler," he said quickly. "He was our trump card in the silk combine. We stood to gain wealth that one hardly estimates. Think of it!—the whole of the silk trade in our hands—we should have been millionaires. But I admit that I made a slip over Hervey—I was utterly out." He started as some noise in the house caught his ear, and trembled like a girl. His nerve was gone, and he

showed as the veriest coward. "I must go," he said, half rising. "They're coming——"

"No, it is only Abdulla carrying in the water jars," she said, laying her hand imperatively on his arm. "Try to tell me more—what was this scheme—what do you mean by clearing the way?"

"No time!" he muttered. "It's too long a tale. The question is what is going to happen now. I shall go out to Health——"

"Really to Health?" she asked with unconscious irony, "or to Banishment?"

"No, of course—what folly! There is no escape from Banishment. From Health I can get up the Gulf or through the Hydromaut and go to Europe. I shall wait there till you wire me news."

"News?" she said half dully, staring at him with wide eyes. She could not grasp her part in all this or see where it was leading her.

"Yes, you must stop here—go on for a day or so as if nothing had happened, and find out for me what Hervey is going to do."

"How?"

"How!" he echoed angrily, almost violently in his fear. "Go to him,—or make him come to you. Ask him point-blank—it's the only way with him. Offer him anything.—Do you hear? *Anything*. Let him name his price for the letter. He wants the site of Hassan's place out in Reserve for a power station—he can have that and anything else he likes to name. Claudia, *make* him give you back that letter!"

His eyes were almost pitiful; he was childish in his fear. It reached her stunned brain that there was

much more here than she yet knew—that a long series of events, piled up behind her husband, was looming over his head now, jagged and unmerciful as the Rocks. He was like a man who should see those great pinnacles tremble, threaten to fall on him—and she could imagine nothing more awful. His terror was somehow communicated to her, so that she found herself saying, “No! no!—you mustn’t be afraid—we will manage somehow,” as one might to a child in the dark.

“Will you?” he almost whimpered. “You’ve got a clear brain, Claudia—you will think of something! You can make Hervey attend to you—you’re the only woman in Exile he respects, except Lady Stroud. Yes, he’ll have to listen to what you suggest!—When will you see him?” he broke off, rising with a little shiver.

“I am dining at Government House to-morrow night—I mean I was,” said Mrs. Everard, putting her hands to her loosened hair as if a little confused. “Do you still want me to go?”

“Good God! Yes, of course!” he said impatiently. “It’s imperative to go on in the ordinary way as long as we can. Will Hervey be there?”

“I—think so.”

“Get hold of him, and tell him you want an interview. And, Claudia”—he turned his head in that same hunted fashion even as he was leaving the room—“you might begin to pack up—just a few things—in case . . . Only don’t alarm the servants—don’t let it get to the bazaars!”

She nodded—she was beyond words. But she

called after him under her breath, "Where are you going—now?"

"The motor is in the road below. It will take me to Hassan's to-night. I shall go on to Health to-morrow. Murgatroyd will get any news through for me—don't write direct—send it by him."

She heard his foot fall softly on the verandah—a stealthy step, like a thief's. Then she felt rather than heard him cross the compound and drop down into the road. He was gone almost before she knew that he had come; but in this short half-hour it seemed to her that he had laid the house in ruins all about her—broken up her home life—altered the face of all the outer world. The inner world—her world, with its centre-piece of hidden passion—he could not alter, because he had neither part nor lot in it.

Mrs. Everard sat still at the little table long after he had gone, her head resting in her hands. Before her hidden eyes she saw the long road over the desert that led to Health, the boundary station, beyond which was the chance of escape to the Arabian coast. Along this road she saw the dusty tracks of the motor car carrying her husband to precarious safety on the morrow—saw it quite distinctly as a stereoscopic view before her hidden eyes. It would take him thirteen hours to get to Health travelling all-day. And he would be off at sunrise. That would bring him to the boundary station at eight o'clock, just as she was dressing for dinner at Government House. But beyond that hour her thoughts would not go. When she tried to push them a little further to see what lay before her at Government House, she turned very sick, and a violent shivering took hold

of all her limbs, even in the hot air circulating round her with the electric fans. She was surprised to find that her teeth chattered a little, and the hands before her face shook. For she was frightened—horribly frightened—even in anticipation.

CHAPTER II

“ We were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise,
And the door stood open at our feast,
When there pass'd us a woman with the West in her eyes,
And a man with his back to the East.”

MARY E. COLERIDGE.

WHEN Lady Stroud and Barbara Playfair entered the Club they walked straight on past the big reading-room where the dances were held, and out on to the verandah and the bridge tables. The group of men whom Mrs. Everard had bowed to broke up at the appearance of the Government House party, and two of them, Rodney Haines and Dr. Bride, came forward to greet Lady Stroud. The rest of the men raised their hats and melted away, Bunney and Yarrow to the bar for whisky and soda and Richmond Hervey to the empty seat beside Mrs. Bride. Nobody looked after him—it is not etiquette to look after a man who steals his neighbour's wife in Exile, though every one present was acutely conscious of his action, and that no other man would have done a thing so blatant in the face of the Club. For the Club is public opinion in Exile, and Richmond Hervey set it at nought. Other couples would have joined each other outside in the dark of the road beyond the lamps, perhaps to drive home

together, but with a certain decency of reserve. Those had never been Hervey's methods.

He dropped heavily into the basket-chair, which creaked under his weight, and looked at his victim. The twitching hands were still playing with the fringes to the ostrich boa round her neck, and some mental strain was drawing two unbecoming lines between her straight dark brows. Hervey regarded her beneath his level eyelids as if she were the problem of an old story that hardly interested him.

"Well, my dear?"

The woman broke out at once, speaking furiously though under her breath, all her quivering nerves driving her to reckless indiscretion.

"You've been here an hour, and never come to speak to me until now! You've never been near me for a week. You know I'm going home by the Mail to-morrow. What do you mean by it? What do you mean?" If her voice had not been under control through the force of circumstances it would have been a wail.

"You were gabbling to Mrs. Everard all the afternoon. You didn't want me to make a third, did you?" Hervey's voice was almost bored. In truth he was bored at this point in the proceedings. He had been through it so often before that he knew each stage that was coming. There were several types of women that he knew—the adventurous, who called an intrigue "sport"; the feeble-minded, who called it "sin" (but sinned none the less); the hysterical, who turned upon herself and him and rent both of them in her remorse; the sensualist, who gave too freely and grew frightened

too late. Mrs. Bride belonged to the hysterical type.

"Why should I want to talk to Mrs. Everard?" she burst out stormily, still wrought up to the height of her despair. "That stick!—but she's respectable. It's come to a pass when I have to choose my company to outweigh the scandal of your attentions!"

He moved a little restlessly, almost uneasily, and she thought that she had touched him. But it was the name of the Chief Justice's wife which had given him the momentary pin-prick. He thought sometimes that he should end by hating Claudia Everard for the sullen shame she roused in him, though he knew her sublimely unconscious of it.

"She is certainly respectable!" he said with a slight sneer. "You might have chosen some other woman who was not quite such a stick."

"There is none, except Lady Stroud, with a reputation like Mrs. Everard's!" said Mrs. Bride harshly. "You know that,—they have mostly been through your hands——"

"You do me too much honour!" he suggested ironically.

"Or somebody else's. I daresay there are plenty of other poor devils, even in Exile, who wished they had died sooner than have ever seen you. You've behaved disgracefully to me, Richmond—disgracefully!"

She drew her throat back and her eyes blazed at him. She was a little, thin woman with big eyes and a restless mouth. It had interested him to see her face alter beyond her control under his handling. It was like playing on a finely strung instrument.

The last woman—the one before her—had been somewhat like a doll, he remembered, and they had bored each other very soon. He yawned. He was a little bored now.

“Disgraceful,” he repeated, as if taking up her last word with a certain politeness. “Well, what comes next?”

“Next?”—she gave a short laugh. “I’m going home to-morrow.”

“Are you sorry?” he asked, almost curiously.

“No!” she hurled at him. “I’m glad—I’m glad to get away from it all. I wish I’d never looked at you—never had anything to do with you. Why haven’t you been to see me for a week?” she harked back, her voice trembling a little as if she would like to cry.

“Because I was out at Reserve, at the water-works——”

“Because you were tired of the whole thing!” she interrupted ruthlessly. “You meant to bring it all to an end like this and save a scene. You thought I should make a scene! Well, I would if I thought that you would hate that most.”

“Did you want a scene?” he asked without even glancing at her. “I am sorry I did not oblige you. If you had told me, I really would have given you a chance,—though I was pressed for time,” he added thoughtfully.

She rose suddenly, pushing back her chair, her betraying hands hidden under the ostrich boa. “Ritchie, you are a brute—a brute beast and nothing more,” she said with a sudden quiet. “It hasn’t been your fault—it has been mine. I was idle and

vicious, and you were only the means to the end. Good-bye, and when you think of me remember that there was one woman who despised you as her own tool."

She left him standing by the two empty chairs and hurried across to the verandah. He followed leisurely, and heard her saying good-bye to Lady Stroud and speaking of her departure on the morrow. It struck him as a situation at which he had assisted many times before—only the last woman had said that she despised him as he deserved; it was rather more original to call him a tool. It did not upset him in the least, because he knew that the fault had been equal on both sides. If he had tempted, Mrs. Bride had stretched out empty hands for the temptation. "Idle and vicious"; yes, they were mostly that in Exile. That he was not so idle as most perhaps proved him the more vicious.

He watched Mrs. Bride join her husband and leave the Club with him to find their car. Tommy would be alone to-morrow, and would no doubt console himself in his turn. . . . Then he found that Lady Stroud was speaking to him.

"I'm so disappointed you can't dine with us to-morrow, Mr. Hervey. Are you sure you cannot get away?"

"I am afraid I shall be out at Reserve until too late, Lady Stroud. I don't get back as a rule until eight o'clock or half-past, and I'm hardly in a fit state to appear as I am!"

"Those darling waterworks of yours! I believe you are the only man in Exile who really likes his work. Well, come on after dinner and have a chat

with my husband. He says he has not seen you to speak to since we have been back."

"Thanks—if I may."

"Hervey," said Captain Bunney, returning from his whisky and soda, "will you cut in with me? Yarrow has to leave, and Haines has failed us."

Hervey nodded, looking as he passed to see why Haines preferred to sit out, and found him still talking to Miss Playfair. Her open enjoyment of the novel scene round her (it must be reiterated that she had only just arrived from England) seemed to amuse or interest the Colonial Secretary, for his nervous, sensitive face was turned towards her with a certain kindliness that made him rather winning. Hervey had sometimes had a dim idea that if Claudia Everard felt any interest in a man other than her husband Rodney Haines would be the man, and he wondered whether this new arrival would really attract Haines, and whether Mrs. Everard would feel any pain in consequence. He would never know—with a woman of that type one never could know—but the thought gave him a certain streak of satisfaction. He could not forgive Mrs. Everard her superiority to human weakness, and it made him almost petty in his resentment.

Barbara Playfair's candid eyes had rested on him also as he passed to the bridge table, with the same questioning look she had given to the ships and the outline of Banishment islet and the little club-house.

"Who is that big man who has just passed us?" she asked Haines, her voice a little lowered so that it sounded almost confidential. "He looks so dreadfully strong—he must be somebody."

"Quite right, Miss Playfair; he is very much somebody in Exile. He is the man who brought water from the solid rock, in Biblical phrase, and made it possible for us all to be here. Before Richmond Hervey there was only an E. T. Station and a gunboat in the bay."

"I felt sure he was somebody," the girl insisted, delighted with her own acuteness. "Can't you always tell? I can. I somehow sense strong people."

"You must go out to Reserve and see Hervey's waterworks. He's just endowed us with the electric light, and wants half the town for a power station."

"I should love to see them!"

Haines laughed half tenderly, as at a child. "You shall see everything!" he promised. "There are wonderful silks to buy in Reserve at the shop of one Hassan, who is an Arab trader."

"I think the Arabs are so interesting!"

"He makes a very good picture. Do you take photographs?"

"Oh, yes—I got some snap-shots at Port Said, and as we passed Suez and Perim, but it was too dark at Aden, we got in so late."

"What a shame! Did you enjoy the voyage?"

"Every moment of it. We had such nice people on board!"

"That you were quite sorry to tranship at Aden?" He spoke teasingly, but there was the faint resentment of the male in his tone who suspects the presence of other males.

"I liked the Connection boat, too. And then it was only for two or three days, and then this!" She drew a long breath of pure pleasure, and turned

her glad young eyes on the scene before her—the bored men playing bridge, the women looking at out-of-date illustrated papers, the dying sky behind Banishment islet, the little, strange, un-English club-house.

Perhaps it struck Haines as a little pathetic, this idealising of Exile Club by an untried nature. He looked round him with his understanding eyes and wondered whether it seemed otherwise than a poor alternative for better distractions to any one else present? They all liked the Club because it was the only decent place to go to; they all hated it because it was Exile. To this girl, fresh out from England, it was new, and startling, and ravishing with possibilities.

“ You think you shall like Exile ? ” he said, and again there was that lingering tenderness in his voice that he used for children.

“ I shall love it ! ” said the girl frankly. And she looked at Rodney Haines for a moment as if she loved him too—the love of a child for some one who is taking it to a pantomime. But he would have been interesting, even without Exile. What sad blue eyes he had !—merry and sad at once ; and what a curious, changeable face. She thought him rather old—he was thirty-eight—and wondered if he were married and what his wife was like. And Rodney Haines, looking at her, thought that she put him in mind of Mendelssohn’s Spring Song. There was always something a little pathetic in the Spring Song to him, despite its gaiety. Or was it a Chanson of Chaminade’s ?

Lady Stroud had played out two rubbers before

the Admiral appeared to take them home, and then they had to linger while he had a whisky and soda, and talked to one and another. Richmond Hervey was going out of the Club as he was coming in, and said " Good-night, sir ; I am coming up to Government House to-morrow night. Lady Stroud says I may turn up after dinner."

" Can't you dine ? " said the Admiral with regret. " Too busy ? Well, come as soon as you can—for the Lord's sake, my dear man, let me have somebody to talk to who is not on the Staff ! " They laughed and parted. It was curious how other men liked Hervey, despite his follies with women.

His car was waiting for him outside the Club, and he got into the front seat and drove himself home, though almost any other man would have left it to his Arab chauffeur. Hervey's bungalow lay out in the sandy stretch of desert beyond the Fort, a little off the road to Health. It was an equal distance from the Fort and from Reserve, and he was in telephonic communication with both places. The singing lines of the telegraph accompanied him all the way, and the desert winds played on the wires and drew strange notes from them that sounded like semitones and now and then a chord. The road did not ascend at all, but ran at the foot of the Rocks, and Hervey gradually increased the pace as he got beyond the Fort until the " Luna " hummed along at fifty miles an hour. Away on his right lay the turning that led up into the Rocks and the lights of the Chief Justice's bungalow. He looked up as he passed below it, and that ugly smile was again on his lips.

The wind across the desert was as cold as ice with

the speed of the car, and when they left the telegraph poles and swung off to their left the Arab chauffeur uttered a prayer of gratitude to Allah, though he had sat beside his master without a shiver. There was an Arab village here called Golgotha, and the flare of its lamps made a lurid glow in the distance. Nearer at hand were the outlines of several two-storied bungalows and the tossing plumes of date palms, for the brackish wells of the desert made cultivation of some sort more possible than on the rock foundation of Fort. The largest house in the district was Hervey's, and its garden stretched out around it in unequalled luxuriance ; but directly across the road was another bungalow, not much smaller, though less well built. This place was empty of permanent owners, but was often taken by people who wanted a change from the Fort, and it was here that the Admiral and Lady Stroud put up when they broke the journey to Health. It belonged to Hassan, the silk merchant, who kept it half-furnished for chance visitors. It was known as " Half-way House."

Hervey swung the car through the gates and up the sandy drive to the front of his own bungalow, where his white-liveried servants received him and bowed him in. It was a large house, with high rooms that looked almost vast from the fashion in Exile of one apartment leading out of another until they were nothing but a dim vista of pillars and space. He went through the dining-room and into his own library and study, and sat down at his writing-desk. There were several letters and a telephone message that had arrived during the afternoon. He took up the receiver of his own telephone and rang up

at once, leaning his elbows on the great rolled-top desk.

"Put me on to the waterworks at Reserve," he said quietly. And a minute later he was talking as composedly as if face to face with the clerk in charge.

"Oh, is that you, Myers? . . . Yes, I've had your message . . . sorry to keep you waiting at the works. . . . You have seen Hassan personally? . . . That is his final answer? . . . Let me understand—he refuses to sell any property at all in Reserve? . . . I had better have that in writing. Post it to-night . . . No, don't see him again—even if he asks. . . . We take that as his final answer. . . . Yes, quite right. You can go as soon as you have written that letter. . . . Good night!"

He rang off and put the receiver back on the rest. Then he sat still for a moment looking straight before him, and then he laughed—the same laugh that had startled Rodney Haines at the Club.

Hassan had not seen the Chief Justice yet, that was obvious, or they had not elaborated a new plan of campaign. The site for the power station was being held back as an additional bait—or else as a desperate bribe for his silence? Fools! He laughed again as he thought of the contents of Everard's letter—that priceless letter that lay in the safe upstairs in his bedroom. That any man could run his head into a noose as Everard had done seemed to Hervey the last rash act of a brainsick fool. He had almost admired Everard's ruthless mishandling of justice—it seemed so fearless in its wickedness; but the man must be but a blundering villain after

all to so miscalculate. He knew as well as Everard where the danger to him lay, and that there was one dread before which he cringed as a coward—the fear of bodily harm and death. He who had mishandled the law for his own purpose was terrified of the rough justice that stood without the law. He was frightened of the Arab population. The Chief Justice had always sheltered himself behind his official authority; once let it be known in the bazaars that he had abused it, that by his own showing he had falsely sentenced the small traders, and popular feeling might take the law into its own hands. He was bound to the Jews, too, against whom there was smouldering feeling amongst the Arabs, and had sacrificed certain Arab traders to Jacobs & Co.—it was all set forth with shameless clearness in that damning letter. The man was certainly a fool! Hervey had no use for failure or weakness, and the Chief Justice had first failed and then run away. He knew that Everard was not coming back to Fort on the expected date, and he guessed that he would take flight for Health the minute he found that he had implicated himself.

Suddenly he remembered Mrs. Everard, and a little cold curiosity crept into his eyes. In hitting the husband he could perhaps get a double blow at the wife. He was shrewd enough to guess what others would not have credited—that she was, or had been, absolutely in the dark with regard to her husband's fraudulent convictions, and that it would be a blow dealt straight at her pride and her confidence. It would go hard with such a woman, and he was not sorry, though he told himself that

he pitied her. This was the conventional phrase, beneath which lay the sting of his scorn of himself under her passing glance. It would be a better revenge on Mrs. Everard than any he could have planned in petty malice, and he hugged it in secret, telling himself that he had not planned it, that he could not avoid it, and that things must simply take their course. He had all the cards in his hands, and he was simply playing a waiting game. One after the other Everard and his wife would feel the whip lash of his unbending determination.

He thought of Mrs. Everard, curiously enough, far more often than of Mrs. Bride, despite the intimate relations that had been only lately broken between him and the latter. That scene to-night at the Club had ended it in his mind—these things always ended so, more or less—and he drew down the curtain with a cynical shrug, conscious that she was in reality as relieved as he, though her passionate protest might salve her own conscience. She had had no least spark of love for him; no woman ever had loved him that he could remember, though too many had made it a plea to outrage love's most sacred rights. He looked at his face in the glass that night as he went to bed, and he did not wonder. But the fascination of his strength and his brutality and his position in Exile had answered as well as the attractions of gentler men. He thought that he had had all he wanted. It was noticeable that even Mrs. Bride herself had not suggested his coming on board the Connection steamer to see her off, though half Exile would be there. She realised as well as he that the incident was over. Hervey's mind harked back

to Mrs. Everard rather than Mrs. Bride ; he was wondering how soon she would raise her eyes and see the sword hanging over her husband's head.

" She's a good woman," said Hervey with a sneer. " I suppose she'll pray—or cry ! "

* * * * *

The Admiral and Lady Stroud got small chance for comparing notes or for confidence in the busy round of their duties ; but as they dressed for dinner they were apt to pass comments to each other on the events of the day in English, Lady Stroud's maid having been carefully imported from India before she had learned any language but her own. As for the Admiral, he had his servant, of course, but took care to leave him outside the dressing-room until called for. The man stood on the mat to be sworn at, he said.

Lady Stroud had been full of Barbara, her frank ignorance and her possibilities of charm. A girl was rather a breathless charge in Exile, where the species was practically unknown.

" When you come to think of it, every other woman is married," she said. " Except the Brides' French governess, and she's gone to Health with the children while Mrs. Bride is away."

The Admiral was quarrelling with his collar-stud, and said " Harump-hough ! " just like an angry elephant. It did not refer to the governess, for he had never seen her, but to his tingling fingers. He had come into Lady Stroud's room, where the light was better, and had taken possession of the glass ; but having banished his servant to the mat outside his dressing-room door he had no outlet for his feelings.

"By the way, Jonathan," went on her Excellency, trying to look round his raised elbow to see that her hair was all right (the Admiral was really selfish over the looking-glass), "I did not know where to look this evening at the Club—I'm thankful she's going home! Mr. Hervey is too atrocious—one tries not to see, but he thrusts it on one!"

"What's the matter with Hervey?" said the Admiral, dropping his arm. The collar-stud had yielded to superior force, but had given as good as it got. He rubbed his fingers.

"Why, Mr. Hervey's affair with Mrs. Bride! It has been too outspoken. I felt as if I were countenancing it. He went straight to her side and sat and talked to her alone at the Club!"

"Seems to me it's a good deal more decent to be above board, if he wants to talk to her, than to wait till all your backs are turned! Why shouldn't a man go and sit by a woman at the Club?"

"Oh, if it's all right between them!—but it isn't."

"It's never been proved that it isn't. Even Bride has never objected."

"He's been with her everywhere—he was always at their house——"

"That's no proof," said the Admiral obstinately.

"Oh, my dear, who wants proof when we all know?" said Lady Stroud in despair.

The Admiral exploded in muffled mirth. "Truly feminine reasoning!" he said. "You can't prove it, but you know it all the same! Let Hervey alone, Fanny—he's a good man for the Government."

"He's a very bad one for the private citizen!"

retorted her ladyship, wrinkling her brows with annoyance, for she was a kindly woman and hated to think ill of any one. But Hervey had put himself beyond the pale of charity. "There was Colonel Deane's wife, the one that went to India, and Mrs. Peters, and that Smyth woman. It's been a succession of scandals ever since we came, and I have no doubt there were heaps before!"

The Admiral had taken up his wife's brushes, and was absent-mindedly patting his hair flat, for it had a tendency to curl, which was unbecoming to a Governor. He was a handsome man and he knew it, and Lady Stroud knew it too and rejoiced in it.

"Mrs. Deane had a past before ever she came to Exile, and so had the other women by all accounts," he said shrewdly.

"Yes, but the worst of Mr. Hervey is that when he meets a woman with a past he always tries to make it a present!"

The Admiral roared. "Well, it's no use blaming him so long as the women themselves don't do so!" he said shrewdly. "And apparently they like it. I deprecate scandal as much as you do, but this place is full of it. Look at my Acting Chief Justice and his house at Banishment—about which, of course, I know nothing! I'm glad Hervey's coming in to-morrow night anyway," he added in a brisker tone. "And so are you too, whatever you think of him."

"I think he's a horrid man!" said Lady Stroud indignantly. "And I like him so much too!"

The Admiral kissed her. "Am I all right?" he

said. "Where's that scoundrel of mine? I've no tie!"

"You look beautiful!" said Lady Stroud with conviction. "Don't say anything to him *very* loud, Jonathan. I am afraid Barbara might hear—all the rooms are so open!"

CHAPTER III

“ Sweet is the music of Arabia
In my heart, when out of dreams
I still in the thin clear mists of dawn
Descry her gliding streams.

“ Still eyes look coldly upon me,
Cold voices whisper and say,
‘ He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,
They have stolen his wits away.’ ”

WALTER DE LA MARE.

WHEN the sun rose it found the Rocks standing stark and colourless against the grey sky. The early morning is frequently cloudy in Exile, and the full glare of day does not come until ten or eleven o'clock. Sometimes a few drops of rain will fall from the clouds, and a very cold wind blows off the desert. But it only rains in reality once or twice in the year, and then the baked roofs of the houses crack and strain and let in torrents of water, being shrunk with long drought. At Government House a real rain meant rushing into the drawing-room and dining-room with baths and cloths and receptacles of all kinds, and then there was considerable damage done to the carpets and furniture before it was over.

Mrs. Everard got up as soon as it was light and went out into the verandah beyond her bedroom. She had not slept much, and the chill of the dawn was

welcome to her. All night she had been measuring the miles that lay between her and her husband—the physical miles that seemed so trivial and the mental miles that had grown so vast. He was only a short distance away, in Reserve, lying at Hassan's house, but since yesterday he seemed to her to have withdrawn to the uttermost limits of the desert. As soon as dawn came he would start on his journey to Health, and from there to the port that lay beyond the station; but he was already leagues beyond that in her conception of him—put away from her on the other side of a yawning gulf of knowledge.

They had lived together for eight years, and after the first six months he had tired of her physically. She had accepted the humiliation with the terrified shyness of girlhood, and had lived in his house half-ashamed and half-relieved. As the years went on the relief had outweighed the shame, and she had settled into the position of figurehead to his household, manager of the routine of their mutual life. She never asked herself whether she had rivals, or who they were. It had seemed to her immaterial so long as he was satisfied with her titular position as his wife, and a gross thing to bear in mind. She had never loved him as the revelation of her later passion showed her love, but she had admired him profoundly, both mentally and physically. He possessed an extraordinary power of representing things to his own purposes, so that he almost persuaded the words themselves to become his pleaders and white to declare itself black. Under normal conditions there was nothing that he could not

explain advantageously to himself, and he had so announced his actions and intentions to her that she was perfectly satisfied with them. When, therefore, he had lost this facility under abnormal conditions the preceding night, when he was hard-pressed by circumstances into statements of bald truth, the shock to her had been one from which she could never recover. She had always thought him extraordinarily clever in his profession and of the intellectual rather than the material type, because he had represented himself so with his plausible gift. In twenty minutes he had stripped the veil from his own purposes and disclosed himself as an exceptionally clever cheat, a gambler, and a sensualist. His aims were simply money to spend on the coarsest pleasures—some inversion of his gift had made him show her this as rapidly as he had formerly shown her false ideals. With his moral virtues the physical beauty seemed to shrink away also, so that she saw his narrow face as no longer good-looking, but mean and loose-lipped.

At first she could not believe it ; she tried to find the faltering excuses for him that he had so fluently found for himself aforetime. That conviction of Lestoc now—that must have been right ; he had so presented it to her that she saw him as the minister of plain justice in the face of public prejudice. She had felt a secret pride in being unpopular when his convictions swept one man after another into prison. Through it all she had believed in him, she had upheld his judgments. And he had crumbled this belief away with one brief confession—"I stated everything openly in that letter—I told him

how I had cleared the way. . . . We stood to gain wealth that one hardly estimates. Think of it ! The whole of the silk trade in our hands." She remembered the cases—Lestoc, Arabi & Co., Raschid Taima,—they came tumbling back into her mind one after another, the most unpopular of his sentences, and all within the last six months that Chief Justice Yale had been home on leave. He must have been trading illicitly too—he, Edgar Everard, when he was only Crown prosecutor and police magistrate—since he had been waiting for temporary promotion to do his "clearing of the way." The whole fabric of Mrs. Everard's domestic and social life was in a moment torn up as if by an earthquake during that breathless half-hour the evening before. She wanted to readjust her perspective, to focus the lens of her mental sight both on her husband and herself.

The growing light striking on the Rocks brought them into their resistless prominence. Claudia Everard looked at them with a kind of relief, as at something at least that had not altered since last night. They were flat coloured, toneless, grey and brown in the morning, with no depth of shadow, and yet as sharply defined as a stereoscopic view. The little bungalows perched upon their lower slopes, the low roofs of the Marines' quarters, were exactly like the cardboard buildings in a child's toy landscape which are cut out and pasted on to the ground plan. There was neither tree nor shrub in the whole of Mrs. Everard's extended view—nothing but the hard Rocks, the little hard buildings, the hard line of sea on the horizon.

After a while she went into her bedroom, had her bath, and dressed. Then the gong went, and she followed it into the dining-room, through the pillars, and sat down to breakfast. Everything was covered with fine wire or gauze on account of the flies—even the bread had a weighted piece of net thrown over it—and Abdul stood behind her chair with a fan to wave them off her plate. They were not so bad up here in the Rocks as down on the shore, but they were bad enough. The day deepened, the dust and glare began to assert themselves over the whole of Fort Exile; some of the Arab servants drew the jalousies closer, and the bare clean rooms took on a kind of twilight of their own.

Mrs. Everard ate her fish-cakes mechanically (the cook was a good one, trained by herself with unwearying patience in her husband's service; it was part of her married duty, as she conceived it), and pushed back her chair with relief when they were finished. One function of the ghastly day at least was ended. She wondered how she would fill in the hours that lay between her and the dinner at Government House, for it was this that she really dreaded to an extent that hardly allowed her to think of it. She was rather methodical in her mental processes, and ready to face a situation beforehand; but she could not face the meeting with Hervey or arrange her speech with him. Her mind kept on edging away every time that she brought it to the verge of thinking out what she must say and do. It was a horror of catastrophe.—

She had hardly left the breakfast table and-walked from dining-room to drawing-room before

the name of a visitor was brought to her. This was not unprecedented in the Fort, where society was so small that men and women seemed to have their lives in common, and privacy was limited to midday rest ; but Mrs. Everard would have refused to receive had it been any one but the Crown prosecutor. Stanley Murgatroyd had taken her husband's place on his promotion, was his most intimate friend, and assuredly in his confidence. He must have been so, indeed, to further Everard's misuse of judicial power. She said " Yes, of course," to the butler, and turned to meet Murgatroyd almost before he was in the room with a leap of the heart for some new crisis, some piece of bad news.

He was a very tall man and extraordinarily emaciated, the climate of Exile having given him permanent dyspepsia. She thought involuntarily how parchment-coloured his face was as he entered, and that his ailment must be worse, and then it crossed her mind that he was suffering a mental anxiety only second to her own. He had very deeply-set eyes that never seemed to be looking at her, and yet she felt that they were seldom off her face, and she had always pitied him for an unprepossessing personality. Few people liked Murgatroyd, and he was spoken of as Everard's satellite. Claudia Everard knew that he possessed a boundless admiration for her husband, and a devotion to him that was almost servile. He was almost sure to be involved in Everard's ruin—if it came to that.

" Sit down, Stanley," she said kindly. " Have you had breakfast ? "

"I breakfasted at eight, thanks," said the magistrate in his usual brief fashion.

Mrs. Everard nodded to the butler, who was still waiting for orders. "It is not necessary to wait, Abdul,—Mr. Murgatroyd has breakfasted." Then as the man vanished to the far recesses of the long rooms—"Well?" she said, dropping her voice. "What is it?"

He raised his cavernous eyes, and she was startled by the excitement in them. It struck her for the first time that he had a look of the fanatic—she had always thought of him as a dull, conscientious drudge, and had accentuated her kindness towards him by the use of his Christian name as her husband did.

"Have you seen him?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes—last night."

"He told you——?"

"As much as he had time to tell. He was only here half an hour."

"Do you know where he slept?"

"At Hassan's."

He half started up. "Is he there now?"

"I think not—I don't know. He was to start at daybreak for Health." Some reflection of his uneasiness communicated itself to her tingling nerves, so that she spoke in sharp, rapid whispers.

He dropped back in his chair. "I might have caught him—if I'd known," he said. "There's something he ought to hear. Could Hassan get in touch with him at once at Health?"

"He might—he has agents there."

"I don't want it to go through me. Hervey's on

the look out already—he could stir up Health as well as Reserve. I believe I am being watched.”

“ Yes,” she said simply. It would have seemed incongruous yesterday to think of the Chief Justice or the magistrate being watched—that they should not go and come unquestioned ; now the undreamed-of seemed the inevitable thing.

“ How long does he stay at Health ? ” he demanded.

“ He does not stay—goes straight on to the Port.”

Then he started to his feet again, trembling. “ He must not go—he must be stopped at Health,” he said rapidly. “ Did any one see him last night ? ”

“ I think not—I believe not.”

“ Then they do not know that he returned from Bani—from Health ? ”

“ No.——”

“ They must think he stayed there and has never gone away.” A sullen shame seemed to cross his face, and she divined that many people had known that Everard was not at Health at all, but at Banishment. It was only she who had been duped ; but then she was his wife. Nevertheless, he had been reported at Health and must still be reported there. “ They must not think,—Hervey must not dream,—that he thinks of going on to the Port—yet,” said Murgatroyd.

She looked up with a troubled face. “ He is so panic-stricken ! ” she breathed. “ I am afraid nothing will keep him there——”

“ He must stay—I tell you he *must*—as long as Hervey holds that letter.”

They stared at each other blankly, and she saw to

her bewilderment that his eyes seemed to be moist. Did he care for Edgar so much as that? It struck her as a revelation, something she had not fathomed.

"You too!" he said brokenly. "You are suffering—we have all made you suffer." Then she realised that she was trembling, and that it was his reference to the letter and Hervey that had made her do so; but he had not linked cause with effect.

"It is nothing," she said hastily. "What are we to do?"

"Could you get a message to Hassan? So that no one should guess? Do not use the post if you can help it—do not even write!"

She thought a moment. "I think so. I am allowed to visit there, and to meet his wife. I have been to several of the houses of the richer Arabs—Lady Stroud goes too, you know."

He drew a breath of relief. "You can go to his house then and see him?"

"If he is there. The ladies of his household generally receive me alone, but he has come in once or twice."

"Wait till he comes—see him somehow," he said eagerly. "And tell him that Edgar must stay at Health as if nothing had happened—as if he had no idea of going further. Hassan can telegraph in cypher to his agents—they use a business cypher."

"I will tell him." Her nerves seemed braced up to the pitch of his. "I had better not leave a note if he doesn't come in?"

"No—no! For God's sake nothing more in writing!" he said with a shudder, and again that

strange trembling seized her. "Stay on till he does come—Arab ladies think nothing of long visits, they like you to stay for some hours."

She did not tell him of her engagement to dine at Government House or what it involved. She felt she could not speak of it, though she supposed that he knew that Everard had apportioned her her share in the desperate fight for safety. She felt sure that he knew a minute later when he was turning to go, and came back to her and held out his hand half timidly.

"You must not be frightened—Edgar is so wonderful, he knows they cannot touch him, legally. It was only that one fatal mistake of trying to bind Hervey to us. Hervey could set all Exile in a flame. . . . I wish we could have kept you out of it!"

"You ask impossibilities, Stanley!"

"Yes, yes, of course. Edgar forgot that it involved you as well as the rest of us. You were bound to know, and to help him. Do not worry—we will see that he is safe, whoever else is sacrificed!"

She was confused into silence, and he took his departure. His simplicity seemed suddenly incredible—his devotion to both Edgar and herself almost a touching thing. It had not once been possible to fling the revolution of her mind in the face of his attachment to her husband, or to raise one cry of the horror that consumed her. He seemed to have no moral sense beyond fidelity to Everard; he had felt neither fear for himself, nor shame, nor humiliation—she was sure of it. And yet he was involved in these judicial crimes, this flinging of

innocent men into Arab prisons to get them out of the way, this cheating and trickery, and selling of a high office. If the populace threatened the Chief Justice's bodily safety they would not spare the Crown prosecutor, but the fear of such reprisals had been all Everard's, or for Everard, until Murgatroyd loomed almost heroic by contrast. She put her hands up to her temples as if she could not reason. Her mind seemed stunned with it all. And through it and underlying it she was conscious of the cold fear lest she should have to sit side by side with Hervey to-night. Lady Stroud sometimes placed her there, as a kind of moral reaction from the society of other women, she thought. She had smiled over it a little scornfully at times. But—would she have to sit and talk to him to-night?

She thrust the fear away from her with both hands, throwing them out in actual physical revolt. Thank God, Murgatroyd had given her something to do—some action that should prevent her thinking. She rang the bell, and ordered the carriage for four o'clock this afternoon, to drive into Reserve, and then fell to her Arab books, studying the language feverishly until lunch-time. There was no sleep for her after lunch, but she lay on her bed under the mosquito net (for flies were worst in the heat of the day, though there were no mosquitoes), and read a heap of books which she had snatched off her shelves without looking at them:

"Que sont-ils devenus, les chagrins de ma vie ?

Tout ce qui m'a fait vieux est bien loin maintenant——"

Would it indeed be like that some day? Would

they all seem far off, these "chagrins" of her life? She turned the page idly:

"Un souvenir heureux est peut-être sur terre
Plus vrai que la bonheur."

She read without knowing that it had entered her brain at all, for her thoughts were wandering. She was taking her seat at the dinner-table this evening, next to Hervey, and waiting an opportunity . . . She flung the French poems aside, and took up an English book of essays:

"To marry is to domesticate the recording angel . . ."

Oh, heavens! was there no escape for her tired mind, even in books? They began to make a jumble in her head, so fast she turned them over.

"He knew that he had done a villainy; knew it and did not repent. . . . To create a solitude where he alone might reach one woman's figure, he would have set a world afire."

"'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking at the moonlit door."

"No man can make haste to be rich without going against the Will of God, in which case it is the one frightful thing to be successful . . ."

Her ayah brought her a cup of tea at half-past three, as she had ordered, and she drank it thirstily, before she rose and dressed. Then the carriage was at the door, and then she was rolling smartly down the hill and into the smooth road at the foot that would take her to Reserve. One or two cars passed her on the way, flying past the slower horse-drawn vehicle, and she bowed in answer to lifted hats, wondering in the new sting of her humiliation that they should condescend to salute

the wife of a moral criminal. She wondered how much was suspicioned by other men than Hervey, who did not hold damning proof, but must have recognised the outrage of justice all the same. It seemed a little pitiful to her that she should have been kept so in the dark—a little unfair, even of Providence, to have made her prone to trust widely, and to have given her husband that specious gift of self-justification.—

The road ran all along the foot of the Rocks, and now, at this hour, she thought them most beautiful, for they were full of warm brown shadows and drenched with the golden light of afternoon. Against the smooth blue of the sky the bronze icebergs stood up relentless and unsoftened even by the tender light. Mrs. Everard was conscious that she had grown to love them as something almost animate, something compelling her to look at them.

The road forked after a while, one side of it turning off into the desert—the same road along which Hervey had driven out the night before, and Everard this morning, since it was the only route to Health. The other division turned short to the right and burrowed into the rocks through what was called the Cutting. It led directly into the great extinct crater where the old buried city had lain, and presumably been engulfed by the volcanic convulsion which had also diverted the river that used to flow over a more fertile land. So much in the dawn of humanity had it been that nothing was left to record a name to that city, or what manner of men had lived there. Only antiquarians grovelling in

lava had declared that an unmistakable ground plan was there, and that a great civilisation might once have flourished on a smooth, watered plain. There was, at least, no doubt about the dried river bed, though to the uneducated eye it looked a mere chasm in the volcanic Rocks. Fable always called the city "Phoenician," but there was no remote proof of this.

Mrs. Everard's carriage disappeared into the echoing darkness, and fled by way of electric lamps through the subterranean passage and out into the road again, leading down into Reserve. The Arab town lay below her, flat-roofed, white-walled, with narrow undrained streets, and a busy life as multitudinous as the flies. Reserve belonged exclusively to merchants, Arab and European, save for the solid authority of the police courts and the great waterworks. Mrs. Everard was driven down the gentle slope of the good new road, past the grim walls of the prison, at which she dared not look, and the native sentry. Her heart beat to think who lay behind those barred windows, victims of her husband's rapacity, and she remembered vividly, with a shudder, a tale that had reached even her of Mr. Lestoc serving three months in that unwholesome confinement, and being perforce removed to hospital until he should recover, to endure the remainder of his sentence. Her husband had given a severe sentence—eighteen months, the maximum that he could have given being two years. And Lestoc was a delicate man, with a disease which had developed in prison. . . . She gave a little sob of foolish relief that Everard had

not awarded the maximum sentence. It seemed a redeeming gleam of mercy. She did not know that had he given the two years there could have been an appeal to a higher court in Bombay, and the conviction must have been quashed. Instead she remembered his telling her how the sentence had gone against public opinion—"They would have liked a practical acquittal. They forget that I could have given the cheat two years! I shall be credited for my sternness, Claudia, but never for my leniency. That is the fate of all strong men!"

She sat up a little in the sunshine and gasped. Even now the phrases came back to her with conviction, remembering how he had said them. No one but Everard could have destroyed her belief in Everard, and it had been his relentless purpose to do so when the moment came that she must understand him as he was, not as he had posed to her.

The streets narrowed round the carriage as they turned from the high road. The horses fretted on the curb, and the musical bells under the driver's foot rang out at every corner to warn the pedestrians out of the way. Claudia had always loved the parti-coloured scene, the gay flutter of Eastern rags, and the harmonious bazaars. Every one walked softly through the dust on bare feet, even the camels and the little donkeys raising no sound, though they were so full of business. It was only her own carriage that was noisy, ringing in and out. She saw the dark faces drift by her with a certain loftiness and beauty even in the lowest class, for the

Arab is free-born and carries the stamp on him of a being without the law. Only once did she pass a white woman—a nurse of the Danish Mission, with her long veil hanging behind her and two Arab children trotting at her side. She had the golden hair of her race, and the lengthening light caught it and made it glitter in the dark street—a strange, white figure passing through the coloured crowd, the Arab children clinging to her hands !

Hassan's house was in a noted thoroughfare, and was one of the better class. He was rich for a merchant even now ; he had hoped to be richer in partnership with an unscrupulous judge who had the power to sweep rivals from his path. Mrs. Everard left her carriage at the door, and, passing into a dark entry, inquired of a porter who sat there if she could see the ladies of the house. The man knew her by sight, and did not trouble to inquire. Yes, she could go up, he said, and left her to find her way up a steep flight of stairs in the dark. They were uncarpeted and not very clean, a mere adjunct of the street, and Mrs. Everard stumbled several times before she emerged on to a kind of platform before a closed door and knocked.

It was opened by a small figure in dull crimson with the face of an old woman and the form of a child. She held the loose drapery of her dress up to her face until she should see whether her visitor were man or woman, with the instinct of the Mahomedan ; but at sight of Mrs. Everard she uttered a little soft sound of pleasure and scuttled away to make her presence known indoors, for this

was the real entrance to the house. Downstairs was only the outer fortifications.

"May I come in?" said Claudia in Arabic, hesitating to enter the hall, though she knew her way from former visits.

There was a little patter of feet, a gurgle of words, a soft laugh, and then two younger women appeared with unveiled faces to draw her forward with expressions of the liveliest interest and hospitality. The few English women who had been admitted into the inner precincts of the better-class Arab houses were very welcome, for they made an interesting break in the lives of the Mahomedan ladies, none of whom went out into the streets until dusk, while those of the highest rank never went out at all after marriage, but took their airing on the roofs.

Claudia Everard followed her guides through a passage room on her left, where the old woman who had answered the door sat on the ground manicuring the hands of a child of some ten years and darkening the nails with henna. There was no furniture in this room, but some beautiful brass lamps stood in a row by one wall ready for lighting, and by another some coffee-pots that would have broken the heart of a collector. They were beyond price, and unobtainable in the bazaars of Reserve, these household belongings of the richer Arabs. Beyond the passage room was another platform open to the sky, and beyond this again the living and reception room of the womenkind. The house appeared to be built in sections at all sorts of angles, for this last room overlooked the street from a great height, but it was

probably situated over some one else's entrance and staircase, the one by which Claudia had entered being far behind her.

The two women who had conducted her in were no more than nineteen or twenty, though the elder of the two looked far older than her English guest. She had a buxom prettiness that made her matronly, and was dressed handsomely in silk and gold tissue with many gold and glass bangles on her bare brown arms—such arms! beautiful enough to serve as models for the completion of the Venus of Milo. She waved Claudia to a seat, talking with voluble pleasure and smiling with friendly eyes upon her guest.

"We bid you welcome, madam! It is long since you have been to see us! Lady Stroud was here a few days ago. We are delighted to see the English ladies!"

The younger woman had in the meantime apparently informed the whole household that they had a guest, for in a few seconds the room seemed to be full of women, ranging in age from an old grey-haired lady in the dress of a widow to a young girl who could not be more than thirteen. These were all Hassan's female relatives, whose circumstances made it incumbent on him to support them, or who helped to do the work of his house. The old widow lady was indeed his mother, and there was a sister-in-law with a baby in her arms, besides two or three other children of very few years. One small dark-eyed boy of four was the only male creature in the room besides the baby.

It was not a large room either, or it did not look

so when full of coloured draperies and floating veils and garments modified from the Indian saree ; and its peculiar furnishing detracted from its space still more. At one end was a carved bedstead canopied with embroidery, at the foot of which stood a beautiful inlaid chest. Round each side of the room were cushioned seats reminding Claudia of pews in a church, save that they were more narrowly divided. They were so padded with cushions as to be rather high, and when she sat down on one her feet barely touched the floor, tall though she was. In the centre of the room was a round table, of obviously European make, with a gramophone standing on it, and on the walls hung a jumble of glass and china of the commonest kind, such as are seen in seaside lodgings in England, and the brass-work and pottery of the East. The horrid juxtaposition made Claudia gasp even more than the narrow barred windows that could only open half-way.

The pleasant fluttering crowd of women stood round her, admiring and even fingering her dress and asking the eager questions of children. Clinging to them one and all was that strange scent that Arab women have in their clothes, their hair, about their whole persons, and which of all odours seems most vaguely reminiscent of forgotten ages. It is not the smell of incense which haunts India, or like anything used by other races—it is made of dried spices or odorous woods, and it hangs in the nostrils like memory. Claudia liked it. It was somehow part of the strange house and its occupants, just as the women liked the sense of daintiness and freshness in the English ladies. It added to their pleasure

in her visit that her study of Arabic had given her some fluency, for Lady Stroud's knowledge only allowed her to speak in a few conventional phrases. Claudia admired the baby, whose soft, downy head was already decorated with a little embroidered cap, and made friends with the little boy, who was too shy to do more than stare up with eyes of the blackest velvet. How pretty the faces were ! There was hardly a plain one amongst them. She remembered once saying with enthusiasm to her husband that she pitied him for not being allowed to see Arab women unveiled as she could do, the smooth oval faces, laughing dark eyes, and perfect teeth ! And he had smiled. . . . She read a sudden meaning into that smile. No doubt but he had plenty in his house at Banishment, though of a lower class.

She wondered as she sat there amongst them all if they knew that Everard had slept in the house the night before, though barred and bolted away from their quarters, and that he was in hiding. But after a minute's reflection she knew that they did, and were well informed of his having fled in the dawn on the desert route to Health. Shut away behind her barred windows and doors there is nothing that the Arab lady does not know about her neighbours, and though she may only peer at the world from the narrow peepholes of her walled-in roof, she contrives to see everything that goes on in the streets of the city below her—far more than her European sister, who has more to occupy her. They would gossip behind their guest's back, perhaps guess that her visit to-day had something to do with the Chief

Justice being secretly in the house last night ; but there was nothing in the ring of laughing faces clustered round her to betray it.

After a while tall glasses were brought in on a tray, and Claudia knew that she must partake of refreshment or she would bring ill-luck to the house. She did not care for the very sweet iced lemonade after her recent tea, but it was better than the Arab beverage that went by that name, and that was really made of herbs. As she gravely sipped from the long glass she tactfully admired the trimming on the dress of Hassan's wife (possibly he had more than one, but this was the formal queen of his household), knowing that it was the lady's own work. They embroidered skilfully and well, these Arab women, but always for their own adornment.

"We must make some music for you—English music!" said Sitt Indahu Hassan, and Claudia shivered inwardly to see one of the younger women setting the gramophone in motion. The only tunes that presented any melody to Arab ears appeared to be the records of bagpipes, for Claudia instantly recognised the raw skirl in the sounds that poured forth, making further conversation impossible. She listened courteously, still playing with the children, and wondering when Hassan might himself arrive and how long she could stretch her visit out. She was conscious of a feeling of exhaustion and extreme tire for the first time, and the Arabic that came so easily with her teacher was a dreadful effort. Yet she must see Hassan even if she waited until the last minute before returning to dress for dinner at Government House. How strange it seemed to

think of Government House after this Arab household, essentially Eastern despite the gramophone and the cheap china on the walls! How strange Lady Stroud must find it when she came here! Claudia's eyes wandered round the odd room—the cushioned seats, the great bed; she wondered if her lines had fallen in such places whether she would ever have been reconciled to sharing the man she loved with his family and other wives? It was of a life with him she thought rather than of her husband, in whose possession she had no jealousy. Could she have borne it? Then she knew herself foolish, since to be allowed to live with him anywhere, under any circumstances, would have been better than her heart's starvation. The little Arab room would not matter, the other women would not matter, so long as he gave her love for love.

She sat on and on in the deepening twilight waiting for Hassan, that strange scent in her nostrils. And when at last she knew by the flutter of the women that he was coming she rose leisurely and began to say good-bye, mingling her farewells with her greeting to him as he entered, and congratulations upon the health of his family. He accompanied her to the door, and himself carried a light to the gulf of the outer stairs to light her down. She had calculated upon this.

At the head of the stairs she paused and turned her face to him, ashen in the light of the lamp he carried.

“My husband went to Health this morning?” she said without more preamble.

"Yes, madam!" She had spoken low, but in English, and he followed suit.

"Can you communicate with him—in cypher—through your agents there?"

She had often seen Hassan in his own large shop among the silks and the embroideries, but he seemed a different person in his own house, with his face bent on her like that, almost sternly, with keen attention. He was a handsome man, with a black beard and a type of face that is both crafty and noble at the same time. He might be a rogue, but he was not a craven. His villainies would be, had been, bold ones. She found herself almost respecting him for this, remembering the panic fear that she had witnessed last night.

"Do you wish a message, madam?"

"He must not leave Health—he must on no account seem to be running away or to go on to the Port," she said rapidly but clearly. "Mr. Murgatroyd told me to get him warned by some means or other without communicating with him directly. He must appear to be still at Health on leave, as though he had never left it."

Hassan stood silent a moment, holding the lamp in his hand. The light struck upward into his composed face, and she felt the strength in him for good or ill. And still that strange scent of the women's clothes seemed to linger in her nostrils, mingling spices and dried woods.

"The message shall go to-night," he said at last, and she found herself instinctively relying on his assurance.

"You think you will be in time? He will not have left for the Port?"

"He does not reach Health until to-night," he said guardedly.

"But do you think——"

"Madam, it seems that we *must* be in time!"

She drew a breath that was almost sobbing. She had stood the rack for twenty-four hours—and there was worse to come.

"Did any one see him here?"

"No!"

That sufficed her. She turned, without more adieu, to the stairs and descended slowly, Hassan holding the lamp at the top. As she passed the doorway, the porter bade her a loud good-night, and she found her carriage waiting, immovable, in the roadway.

"Get home as quick as you can," she said to the *abuggi*. "I am dining out."

The musical bells and the roll of the wheels sounded once more in the dusty streets, flaring now with electricity, and the wild rush of the outer air bore away the faintness that had seemed to threaten her for a minute. There was something more to be faced—something much worse. The dark tunnel opened its mouth for her and let her through to the outer circuit of the Rocks, which thrust their jagged spires amongst the stars again. It was a beautiful night, fresh and clear; but still in Mrs. Everard's nostrils seemed to hang that old, old scent that Cleopatra might have used, and the Queen of Sheba, and former civilisations yet.

"Long ago," she said, looking up at the Rocks,

“ I was an Eastern slave, and the man I love was my master. And I shook that powder into my clothes to make myself more desirable, and the scent was always with me. I know as well as if it were yesterday—but he has forgotten.”

CHAPTER IV

“ My foe, undreamed of, at my side
 Stood suddenly, like Fate ;
For those who love the world is wide,
 But not for those who hate.”

T. B. ALDRICH.

THE *ayah* had laid her dinner gown on the bed, and was waiting with Oriental calm until her memsahib should submit to be dressed. Most of the wives of high-salaried officials had Indians for maids, the rest of the housework being undertaken by Arab boys. Only the lowest class of Arab women could or would undertake housework, and the English women could not have them as body servants.

Mrs. Everard let down the heavy weight of her hair herself, since Bahoo was not capable of hair-dressing, and proceeded to brush it out with deliberate care. Every stage in her dressing marked one nearer to the moment when she must face the meeting at Government House, and she felt that she could not hurry. The brush seemed to have grown leaden, the length of her hair miraculous as her arm swept steadily down it, brushing out the depths of its dusty gold. It was never bright hair for all the care bestowed on it ; it would not glitter,

it would only give back a dull shine from her small fine head.

"The memsahib will wear the white and gold dress?" asked the *ayah*, as Claudia at last turned from the glass. She had had her bath already; the coils of her gold hair were bound closely round her head, there was no delaying the final putting on of her gown, and declaring herself ready.

"I suppose so," she said reluctantly. She would rather have worn black—it suited her mood, and somehow seemed less noticeable. She felt that she had no right to be noticeable, the wife of a man who was himself an unexposed criminal, even though the law could not touch him. But in that climate women who were still young seldom wore anything but colours. At least the gown that Bahoo was slipping over her head was a dull white crêpe—Chinese crêpe bought at Hassan's, she remembered, and ridiculously cheap for what it cost in England, since Exile was an open port. With the mere name of Hassan some whiff of that strange Arab scent seemed in her nostrils again, and her eyes had grown dreamy while Bahoo fastened her gown.

The sound of the carriage rolling up over the gravel roused her to the hurt of reality and what it portended. She must go now,—she tied a chiffon scarf over her hair, since the carriage was open and there might be a wind, and Bahoo dropped the cloak on to her shoulders.

"Don't wait up for me, Bahoo, I might be late," she said vaguely, with an idle wonder as to how it would be if she never came back at all—if some

convulsion in the Rocks, after all these cycles of years, should suddenly engulf the petty, troubled life at their feet—an insect life compared to their immemorial existence. If only it might all end to-night—the strain, and the bewildered fear, the lost ideal of her husband, and the helpless pain of her love! She was a young woman to feel that death would be an infinite relief in the vortex of her mental experience; but she did feel it, without either sentimentality or affectation, as the carriage bore her away through the intersecting roads of the Rocks towards Government House.

It had struck eight some ten minutes before Mrs. Everard drove out of her own compound. Dinner at Government House was always at 8.30, a concession to the Admiral's preference, for the usual dinner hour in Exile was nine o'clock. The carriage dashed away through the fringe of the Fort, and up another track beyond the Marines' quarters, out on to a headland which was accounted the healthiest spot in Exile. It commanded two bays, and the sea breezes favoured Government House from either side. Unless there was a desert wind, or no wind at all, there was always air up there; but to-night it chanced that there was no wind at all. Mrs. Everard discovered this as she turned in at the gates, past the sentry, and unbound the scarf round her head, giving all her wraps to the red and gold servants awaiting her at the doors. They took charge of her, and marched her through a long grove of pillars up to the further end of the bungalow, where Lady Stroud was chatting to the guests already arrived.

For a minute Mrs. Everard could not turn her gaze from the Arabs' turbans as they announced her, she was so afraid of realising Hervey's presence. But the two red and gold figures drew back and left her going forward blindly to reach Lady Stroud. Then the mists round her cleared, and she saw with a sense of relief that the Government engineer was not present—only the Admiral and Lady Stroud, Barbara Playfair, Mr. Merryn, Rodney Haines, and the Flag-Captain and Mrs. Bunney. Yet Lady Stroud had told her a week since who was coming, and had begun the list with Hervey. Some momentary escape had opened out for her from an impenetrable fate, that was all she knew. Of course, it must come some time—it would perhaps be better to get it over; but she breathed long and sweetly for the moment, with the enjoyment of not feeling an icy hand on her heart.

"Mr. Everard hasn't returned yet, I hear. I nearly telephoned if he *should* come back to bring him too," said Lady Stroud in her pleasant voice. It seemed to Mrs. Everard like treachery to answer that voice, and not to shudder at the thought of Everard eating at honourable men's tables. Hervey had been right in judging that the disgrace would cut her deeply.

"No," she heard herself say composedly. "He has not even settled a day for his return. Indeed, if he decides to stay on for another week, I might be tempted to join him"—and then wondered why she had lied unnecessarily.

"I should, if I were you. I only wish we were out at Health ourselves," said Lady Stroud

cordially. "It must be heavenly after the heat we've had lately. Captain Bunney, will you take Mrs. Everard?"

Claudia put her hand on Bunney's white coat-sleeve and felt a sudden conviction that she was ludicrously hungry and should enjoy her dinner. It was childish, but the cessation of immediate fear had reacted in a desire to snatch some arrears of pleasure from trivial things. Dinner at Government House was generally informal, unless some big official had been reluctantly ordered to Exile, though the men were in uniform and they drank the King's health sitting, after the fashion of the Navy. Mrs. Everard found herself between Bunney, who was her dinner partner, and Rodney Haines, who had brought in Lady Stroud. It was a round table, and the Admiral was sitting nearly opposite, with Mrs. Bunney on one side of him and his niece on the other. The girl's face reminded Claudia of a flower again in its extreme transparency. Her eyes had that opening look which a flower turns on the sun.

"I hope if the soup is not a success that you will none of you allow yourselves to be poisoned with it!" said Lady Stroud as they sat down. "I confess that it is an experiment, and Ramzan had never seen such a thing in India."

"Callia, isn't it?" said Mrs. Bunney, mentioning the one wild vegetable that grows in Exile—under severe cultivation. "I think it quite excellent. And of course he could not have known anything like it in India. It is a triumph for Ramzan!"

"It's a triumph for his sex, rather!" said the Admiral with a twinkle in his eyes. "Even in the

domestic arts, Mrs. Bunney, you must own that men excel women. They are really better cooks ! ”

“ Yes, their hearts are in it ! ” said Mrs. Bunney sweetly, and the Admiral laughed at his own discomfiture.

“ Not even the fondest interest in food would make a Somali a good cook, however,” amended Captain Bunney. “ When Freda and I stayed at Half-way House, on our way to Health, Hassan had obligingly sent us a Somali to cater for our mortal wants, and it very nearly ended in our having *immortal* wants, for he did his best to poison us.”

“ Oh, but we never mess at Half-way House when we go out there,” said Lady Stroud. “ Mr. Hervey’s bungalow is far too convenient ! We send over to him for every single thing we want, if we do not actually have meals with him.”

“ My Government engineer has to combine the duties of hotel proprietor with his own for the entertainment of the Governor ! ” said the Admiral with his rich laugh. “ Ah, well ! Hervey’s a good fellow. I am sorry he couldn’t come to-night.”

“ He is coming in later, in the hope of some music. Mr. Haines, your fiddle is a sure magnet for Mr. Hervey. He is extraordinarily fond of music, though he does not say much about it.”

“ Oh, Hervey and I have regular caterwauls over at his bungalow,” said the Colonial Secretary with his eager smile. “ He plays my accompaniments, and then I play and he criticises. He’s a fine critic. We must get Miss Playfair to sing for him.”

“ I should be afraid ! ” said Barbara, opening her large eyes.

"I am sure you have no need to be!"

"But you have not heard me yet," said the girl with her usual literalness.

He laughed a little, and then something drew his attention to Mrs. Everard, who had leaned back in her chair and was taking absolutely no part in the conversation. He always wondered what it was that made him ask her if she felt the draught from the electric fans too much—if she were cold?

"Not at all," she answered him calmly. And yet he felt as if she had been shivering. Perhaps it was that dull white gown she wore, and her colourless skin, that gave him a sense of chill; but it was a very beautiful effect that Claudia Everard created with her passionless face and figure.

"Do you care for music, Uncle Jonathan?" Barbara was saying, regarding the Admiral with her limpid gaze. She was a favourite already with him because she laughed at his jokes with genuine amusement, and thought him quite beautiful in his uniform. It is difficult to resist the double compliment of a wit and an Adonis.

"No, my dear, I'm a Philistine and a Goth," he informed her in mock confidence. "Haines caught me asleep one night when his rendering of Schubert was drawing tears from all eyes, and since then I've been ashamed to look him in the face. The gramophone is about my standard for music. We'll have the gramophone out after dinner, just to balance Haines' fiddle—turn and turn about with him."

"Oh, my dear, I do *hope* not!" said poor Lady Stroud, who suffered from the shocks produced by her husband's pet records. "You don't know

how dreadful it was on Sunday," she added, turning confidentially to Rodney Haines. "The Archdeacon lunched with us, and the Admiral insisted on his hearing the gramophone before he left. We had had a lot of new records from England, and some of the labels had become unreadable. Mr. Merryn put in one that we thought was 'Waft her Angels,' and the wretched thing began to grind out 'He'd pawned his bags on Saturday night, and couldn't go to Church!' I believe the Archdeacon thought we did it on purpose."

There was a roar of laughter all round the table, and the Admiral laughed loudest. "We didn't realise what had happened for a minute," he said, "because the opening bars are so like a hymn tune. And Merryn lost his head and couldn't stop the thing, and there was that music-hall fellow bellowing out of the record about his old woman asking where his trousers were, and why he couldn't get out of bed! That's a fine record—we must have that one to-night!"

"Really, Jonathan! I must draw the line at some of your records now we have Barbara with us," protested Lady Stroud, seizing on the girl's presence as a merciful protection.

"But, Aunt Fanny, I *like* gramophones!" said Barbara, leaning across the table in her eagerness, with her ingenuous face in the full light of the lamps. Even Lieutenant Merryn smiled, and the Admiral laughed aloud as he patted her shoulder.

"That's right, Babs! You and I will enjoy our records whatever the others do. There's a beauty called 'Nightcaps'——"

“ Oh, I love that song ! ” said Barbara serenely. “ It comes into the *Pyjama Girls*. They used to sing it on board coming out.”

Mrs. Everard looked half curiously at Rodney Haines as he sat beside her, with some curious intuition that he was being subtly hurt—just as he had known that she was cold with terror, though he had not recognised the terror. There was a certain sympathy between their minds that had often helped her to understand him, and she wondered rather pityingly why he should have to suffer through this large-eyed girl who was so truthfully laying bare the shallows of her nature. He was regarding Barbara across the table with the tender indulgence one would give to a child, and yet Mrs. Everard divined that the girl’s frank liking for gramophone music left him a little blank. Probably he did not himself know that he had wanted Barbara Playfair to have a mind that could respond to his own, to feel the magic of music as he felt it, even unto tears. He looked at her candid face and imagined her as a flower or some unrippled surface of pure water ; and all the while Barbara was just a girl.

With that premonition of trouble for him upon her, Claudia Everard watched him later on, when after dinner they walked through the pillars back into the drawing-room, or rather that portion of the bungalow which was used for a reception-room, for it was really all one. She was herself standing by the piano—one of the few pianos in Exile, where they were ruined by the climate—and he was crossing the room with his violin in his hands, for she was to play his accompaniment. He walked with a queer

little swing that was suggestive of a lame gait, though he was not really lame, and for the first time it flashed across her that the reason she had thought his face pathetic was that there was a look in it that one sees in the faces of crippled or deformed people.

"What have you chosen?" she said, taking the music from him. "Gounod's 'Serenade.' Do you ever feel that you have moods in which you cannot play certain music? Does your music depend at all upon your frame of mind?"

"I have had that sort of thing knocked out of me through my work," he answered with a little shrug of his shoulders. "You can't afford to have moods in the Colonial Service!" and he made a wry little face that in another man would have been a laugh. Rodney Haines did not often laugh, though when he did his laugh was as genuine as a boy's; but his voice in speaking was merry, and he had a certain personal humour as if he shared a joke with himself rather than with mankind.

Claudia sat down to play for him, wishing she could see the audience, for she was curious as to how the music would affect certain of them. The aching sweetness of the "Serenade" always struck her as a little out of place in the lights and convention of a drawing-room, and in Haines' hands it lost nothing of its lover's appeal. He drew the bow over the strings a little slowly at first, more slowly than is usual, and she hardly realised when the music quickened, with a hint of delicious passion, until the violin seemed a veritable whisper under a balcony. There was no doubt that the Colonial Secretary of

Exile was a very exceptional amateur, and if his technique was not always flawless he had more than a touch of genius. But Mrs. Everard had never heard him play better than he did to-night, and though it was only Gounod's "Serenade," that she had heard a hundred times, she felt as if something were awakening in the player through the familiar, exquisite air.

"I always feel that I have been defrauded of something when I have been playing your accompaniments," she said gravely as she rose from the piano. "I cannot properly listen to you—and cry."

He glanced at her quickly, and to his surprise saw that two great gems were really hanging on the fringe of her lashes. He had never noticed that Mrs. Everard was affected in this way before, often as she had played for him, because he had always been lightly parrying the applause and the thanks that his audience showered on him for his own performance. He thought he liked her better than ever before, not for the flattery of her tears, but because of the added beauty of her face.

"Does music always affect you like that?" he said. "Perhaps you are like me—I fancy it is my one strong emotion."

"It depends on the music," said Claudia with a fine smile. "You will not find me crying over the gramophone!"

They sat down side by side to hear the next item on the programme, which was Barbara's singing. Lady Stroud played for her, and Mr. Merryn's duty as A.D.C. decreed that he turned over the music. Barbara had chosen a new song that had no affinity

with the ballad type, and was of a school that has entirely ousted the "Some Day" and "In the Gloaming" of the eighties. It is probable that her mother sang "Some Day," but the sickliness of those lovelorn ditties was less incongruous to the atmosphere of a drawing-room than the words which Barbara sang without the least conception of their meaning.

" Our life is like a narrow raft
Afloat upon a hungry sea :
Hereon is but a little space,
And each man, eager for a place,
Doth thrust his brother in the sea.
(And each man, eager for a place,
Doth thrust his brother in the sea.)
And so our sea is salt with tears,
And so our life is wan with fears.
Ah, well is thee thou art asleep ! " ¹

The tune was happily minor, and not too accented. It was one of those songs whose soul is more in the words than in the music, but the two complemented each other well enough had the singer ever lived and learned. Barbara's voice was the pure, tuned organ of a child, developed by careful practice, and trained to work easily and gracefully—that is to say, she drew breath and produced her notes correctly and with ease. But the incongruity of her level utterance and entire lack of expression made it almost ludicrous to Mrs. Everard's ears. She glanced at Haines and saw that he was looking down, his sensitive lips a little drawn.

¹ I do not know who is the author of these words. They are from a poem called "Life."

There was something that was almost pained surprise in his face, despite his control of his muscles.

Merryn turned the page at the conscientious moment, and stood upright with an air of relief. The song struck him as a very silly one, but he vaguely enjoyed the girl's lissom figure and unruffled face as she opened her red lips and sang from her chest—she was certainly not singing from her heart, but then Lieutenant Merryn saw nothing to put your heart into in such nonsense.

“ Our life is like a curious play
Where each man acteth to himself.
‘ Let us be open as the day ! ’
One mask doth to the other say
That he may deeper hide himself.
(‘ Let us be open as the day ! ’
That he may deeper hide himself.)
And so the world goes round and round
Until our life with rest is crowned.
Ah, well is thee thou art asleep ! ”

“ Thank you ! ” said Merryn as the girl turned and lifted the song from the stand.

“ Bravo, Barbara ! ” said Lady Stroud kindly. “ You have a delightful voice. But, my dear, what an accompaniment to read at sight ! ”

“ I am afraid it is tiresome,” said the girl in her fresh, speaking voice—so much more animated than her singing !—“ Thank you so much, Aunt Fanny ! ”

“ Do you sing ‘ Because ’ ? ” asked Merryn a little diffidently. He could understand “ Because,” and he thought the sentiment beautiful in the English version ; he did not know the French. “ I should think it would suit your voice awfully well.”

"It is rather hackneyed, isn't it?" said Barbara. "I got this one"—touching the music she held—"because it is quite new, but people are beginning to talk about it."

"What a curious reason for choosing a song," said Mrs. Everard with a little smile to Rodney Haines. "And how like a child!"

He was sitting with his head in his hands, in an attitude of unintentional despair.

"It was the wrong song for her altogether," he said desperately. "But she could sing some of Chaminade's."

"Or those folk-songs from the English counties," said Mrs. Everard. "If she only would! How delightful the 'Raggle-taggle Gipsies' would be in that unspoiled young voice! I never dared to attempt it."

"It wants the *insouciance* of youth," he agreed, his face lighting up again. "And her execution is quite good enough. When I know her better I will suggest it to her."

"She will not thank you!" said Mrs. Everard, a little whimsically. "She thinks she is quite mature enough for the rendering of any dreadful truth—she does not want to be sent back to the nursery. And Mr. Merryn has just urged her to sing 'Because'!"

"Oh, -heavens!" he exclaimed, and sprang up with one of his impulsive movements as if to prevent the threatened visitation. Claudia saw him cross the space to the piano with that curious halting gait and interrupt the desultory conversation between Barbara and Merryn without apparent

intrusion, but by the very force of his more dominant personality. She watched him leaning over the instrument, talking with his eyes, his shoulders, his hands, every expressive bit of him as well as his lips. He was always living a great deal harder than other people and the fire of life burnt his eyes hollow and the lines into his face. For it was a dissatisfied face, as of a man for ever asking and getting no answer, though Haines himself was but dimly aware of it, and would have laughed off the suspicion as a jest. After a minute his mere vitality drew the girl away from the Flag-Lieutenant as by a magnet and absorbed her in his eagerness, and she stood listening to him with that pliancy of her youth that made his momentary ascendancy seem like mastery. She was not talking much herself—Barbara never did talk much to Rodney Haines—but she appeared quite compliant.

“He will not let her sing ‘Because’!” said Claudia wisely.

But the Colonial Secretary need not have troubled, as the strictly musical programme was over, for the minute at any rate. The Admiral proposed an adjournment to the compound, where lounging chairs were nightly set, and on windless nights the gramophone stood on its own table and absorbed the energies of Mr. Merryn, who sat by its side like a lion-tamer with his beast. The invention of the gramophone extended the duties of an A.D.C. beyond the carrying of cloaks and paying of obligatory calls. His servitude was for the moment so punctilious that it drew a comment even from Mrs. Bunney.

"I wouldn't be a flag-lieutenant on shore, in his capacity as A.D.C., for anything," she whispered to Claudia in confidence, their chairs happening to be side by side. "My husband says it is an acid job. Mr. Merry'n looks like nothing on earth!"

"I hope it leads to something," said Mrs. Everard kindly. "Any one doing the duty of an A.D.C. seems to me to serve seven years for Leah without the hope of Rachel!"

"He is better off than most, anyhow. The Strouds are archangels; they treat him like a son."

"They are very good to all their staff. Mr. Smyth—I mean the Admiral's secretary, not the E. T. Smyth—sat next to me at the Debating Club and spent the evening in telling me how they looked after him when he was down with fever. Where is he to-night?"

"Pigging it with Dr. Bride. I hate a grass-widower's household; it is all cold soup and the smell of yesterday. The food used to be quite good while Mrs. Bride was out here, but I suppose that was on Mr. Hervey's account."

"Hush!" said Claudia, rather suddenly. "I think we ought not to talk."

The mysterious clearing of its throat which a gramophone always makes to ensure silence had given way to the first bars of an obviously comic song. It did not need the Admiral's huge chuckle to prepare the company for the tones of Mr. Rorty Bill's well-known voice issuing from the decorous wooden box in riotous assertion:

“ I am a man who lives by rule
To make me fit for Heaven :
I rise at eight, and go to bed
Somewhere about eleven.
But just before I Foxy-trot
Away to by-by on the spot,
I like a glass of something hot—
It is my little nightcap !
Nightcap—nightcap—everybody’s nightcap.
Some prefer it red as rum, and some prefer a *white cap* !
My old woman calls it sin,—
But I should call it Plymouth gin
When she concocts a nightcap ! ”

Claudia, lifting her head, looked straight up into the endless sky, where the stars drew back and back into infinite distance. The compound was an open space of baked earth in lieu of a garden, screened in by trellis-work instead of trees. It was on the level of the plateau where Government House stood, but immediately beyond the trellis-work the hill fell swiftly to one of the bays, and on the further side rose the tremendous outline of the Rocks. There was a carpet spread upon the bare ground, for the night dew lay heavily upon everything—even upon the lounging chairs and the gramophone on its table. The lamp behind the gramophone burned steadily, and its light fell most brilliantly on Lieutenant Merryn’s immovable, good-looking face as he renewed or put in records, and more faintly on the other members of the group. Contrasted with the width of the sky and the stars, the little cluster of men and women listening to the gramophone seemed to dwindle and shrink to the dimensions of busy ants.

“ Nightcaps—nightcaps—pretty little nightcaps !
All the girlyes go to bed in pink or blue or *white* caps !
‘ Kiss me for a last good-night,
And tuck me in so nice and tight ! ’
They murmur from their nightcaps ! ”

The Admiral had laughed his full and the record had been changed. Mrs. Everard brought her gaze down from Orion, striding across the heavens, and was vaguely aware that Barbara had laughed quite as whole-heartedly as her uncle, and was now listening with equal enjoyment to the swing of a waltz refrain. Her foot kept time mechanically to the rhythm, and her eyes chanced to wander to Lieutenant Merryn's erect white and black figure in its mess-coat and evening trousers. No doubt he would be an excellent partner in a waltz. He looked strong and in training, and he had a good ear for rhythm. Claudia's eyes turned from the girl a little wonderingly to the Colonial Secretary, who, with his head tilted back, was following her own abandoned study of the stars.

“ Let's have ‘ I'll butt in ! ’ Come, Merryn, give us ‘ I'll butt in ! ’ ” said the Admiral as the waltz ended with a methodical clash.

“ My *dear* ! ” said Lady Stroud gently. She glanced at Merryn. The blood had risen a little in his face, and he looked as though embarrassed between laughter and dismay.

“ Shall I—— ? ” he hesitated, meeting her eyes.

“ Jonathan, we really *can't* have that second verse ! ”

“ Well, let's send Barbara to bed ! ” said the Admiral wickedly.

" Oh *no*, Uncle Jonathan ! "

In the universal laughter the advance of the two turbaned servants was unobserved ; but Lady Stroud's salvation in the nick of time was secured by the new arrival entering the circle.

" Mr. Hervey ! " said the Arabs, bowing low ; and in the next breath " Mrs. Everard's carriage ! "

Mrs. Everard had risen leisurely as Lady Stroud was greeting the Government engineer, and had combated the protests about her early departure before he had fairly entered the compound.

" It is half-past eleven," she said. " Thank you ! "—for Hervey had stepped back to allow her room to pass through the opening of the trellis into the hall.

" Can I find your cloak for you ? " he said of necessity, and she answered " Thank you ! " again, surprised that her voice obeyed her will at all, for her whole body shook as if with ague.

For a moment they were alone on the further side of the trellis to the rest of the party, who were still arguing for and against " I'll butt in ! " punctuated by the Admiral's mellow laugh. *Now* was the moment that she must grasp. Now this task given her had to be attempted. And she was paralysed. She looked at Hervey's huge bulk, the massive head and shoulders towering above her, and his physical weight seemed crushing her. She could have screamed for mercy, both for her husband and herself.

And then her voice spoke like a disembodied thing, a servant obedient to subconscious control.

" Are you very busy just now, Mr. Hervey ? " it said. " Could you call upon me—soon ? To-

morrow, if possible. I want to talk to you on business."

He turned rather slowly—he was too big a man for hasty movements—and looked at her with level grey eyes. It struck her that she had seldom seen such cold dislike in any one's eyes. Men were mostly too indifferent to her to hate her.

"Yes," he said deliberately. "I will do my best to call upon you to-morrow, Mrs. Everard. I am engaged in the afternoon, but—about six o'clock?"

"Thank you!" she said again, almost inaudibly. His immediate compliance had told her that he knew the subject of the business to be discussed with him, and his next words struck her as rather ghastly in the light of this comprehension.

"I hope that you have no complaints to make of the new installation?" he said with conventional courtesy.

"No, it is not the electric light," she said with stiff lips. "Good-night!"

She bent her head as he stood aside for her to pass out of the hall. It was still bent as she got into the carriage and was driven downhill. Half-way home it was buried in her hands and she was crying bitterly.

Hervey's prognostication had come true. But it was not because she was a good woman that Mrs. Everard had cried.

CHAPTER V

" And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
Diamond and damask—cheeks so white erewhile
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
Chased on reflection !—pausing, taps discreet ;

' Open the door ! '

No : let the curtain fall ! "

ROBERT BROWNING.

HERVEY'S engagement on the following afternoon was to take the Government House party over the waterworks at Reserve. Lady Stroud had asked him to fix a day for Miss Playfair to see them, and he had named an early date because he thought it likely that he would be cruising next week with the Admiral. Sir Jonathan was never very dependable in his plans, and would surprise his staff by taking the flag-ship up the Gulf or down to Seychelles with a suddenness that made everybody strenuous beforehand for twenty-four hours. Since the war it had been found advisable to relieve the East Indian and Cape commands by curtailing their extended beats, and there had been two cruisers and a gunboat or so at Exile, as well as the torpedo flotilla that was constantly coming and going. But Exile was even more valued for the facilities of its dockyard than as a naval station, and was rapidly increasing in importance on this account.

Hervey was a frequent guest on the *Silverside* when she was cruising. He was an excellent sailor, and no habit that she had of kicking in a swell could banish him from meals (it was notorious that the Admiral was always sick for the first twelve hours at sea); and men always appreciated him as a companion whatever his moral drawbacks. Perhaps he was too massive of mind and body to adapt himself easily to women's fellowship, for, save those who knew him too intimately, women did not cultivate him. Lady Stroud, it is true, liked him in spite of herself, and Barbara Playfair was inclined to give him a wondering admiration, which was generally his portion from girls. To the majority of the women in Exile he was more or less of a dangerous experiment, better let alone. But men of all ages would rather go out to his bungalow in the desert, or to his quarters in Reserve, than to any other house in Exile.

It happened, therefore, as he expected, and he had not been five minutes at Government House before the Admiral turned to him with an invitation.

"Going with me on Thursday, Hervey? I'm off to Bunder Abbas."

"I thought Bunney looked rather greyer than he was last week," said Hervey drily, narrowing his eyes as he glanced across at the Flag-Captain. "All right, sir; I'll be delighted."

"Only a week's cruise—just to keep her going," said the Admiral. "Haines stays here to represent me, as Colonel Damer is down with fever, and Merryn comes along with us."

"Oh, Uncle Jonathan, I do hope you won't take

the gramophone!" said Barbara earnestly; and there was fresh laughter.

"Who's going to work it for you if I take Merryn?" asked the Admiral. "You can't ask Haines—he's the boss here, *pro tem.*"

"Oh, Mr. Merryn can show me how before he leaves. I'll work it," said Barbara readily.

"I shall find all my best records worn out before I get back," grumbled the Admiral, to tease her. "I'll leave it on condition that you don't have 'Nightcaps' more than twice a night, Babs, and 'I'll butt in!' only once."

"Oh, uncle, you've quite spoiled my plans! I meant to have known them both by heart by the time you got back."

"Do you sing, Miss Playfair?" Hervey asked at once, turning to her.

"Not very successfully," said Barbara with unexpected shrewdness. "I sang a song to-night that Mr. Merryn thought was stupid and Mr. Haines beyond my compass."

Merryn flushed uncomfortably, but Haines laughed. "Not your compass, your experience," he said frankly. "Wait till you sing to Hervey; he is a far more brutal critic than Merryn or I."

"I should be afraid to sing to Mr. Hervey, anyhow," said Barbara, turning her candid eyes on the Government engineer. "Are you as fierce as you look, Mr. Hervey?"

"No, only as people make me look," he responded good-humouredly. "If you sang flat I might be excused for a savage distortion of my features, surely!"

"Miss Playfair would never sing flat—those pure sopranos never do," said Haines with the certainty of the expert. "But she might go sharp, if she strained her notes at all."

The girl turned her face to him wonderingly. "What a wonderful ear you must have, or how keenly you must have listened to know that already!" she said. "You might have been studying me and my voice for years—and I only met you yesterday!"

"Some days count an eternity," said Haines quietly.

Barbara thought privately that he was trying to be clever, and she wished he wouldn't. She always thought that a truth must be an epigram if it did not rest upon a material statement. A fine day to Barbara meant that it was not raining, but she had an uncomfortable impression that to Haines it might have meant that his soul was at peace with itself.

Yet she liked Rodney Haines, and liked him more and more with each hour spent in his company. He was so deft and tactful, and so kind; and then he was always at her elbow, and that meant that he was the immediate thing in her mind. She was not biassed in favour of one man or another, and the one who was nearest had her interest. When they motored over to Reserve the following afternoon the two ladies were escorted by the Colonial Secretary and Mr. Merryn. The Admiral was busy in the dockyard harrowing the soul of his chief of staff and the secretary over next week's cruise, and Rodney Haines took his place with Lady Stroud.

When they reached the works, however, Hervey was waiting for them, and naturally dropped into place beside the Governor's wife, leaving Haines to follow with Barbara. Mr. Merryn brought up the rear with Lady Stroud's sunshade. She had contracted a habit of giving him something to carry, as one does a well-bred retriever, when he had no one to escort—perhaps to console him, perhaps to keep him in gentle training.

The waterworks are supposed to be, and perhaps are, the most important buildings in Exile ; but it is as much what they represent as their appearance that is imposing. They stand in a gap between the Rocks, lifted high over the plateau of Reserve, and are partly built upon what was actually the old bed of the river that had watered the city of the Phœnicians. When Richard Hervey first came to Exile fifteen years before he was prospecting for the Government, who were considering the possibilities of finding oil in the desert-land beyond the chain of hills of which the Rocks are the outliers. Hervey came to burrow for oil and report ; but the devil of energy was in him at five-and-twenty, and he burrowed for water as well as oil, having learned its value in Exile. At that time there were, as Haines had told Barbara Playfair, an Eastern Telegraph station where the Marines' mess now stands, a gunboat in Fort Bay (which was then a small coaling station for tramps), and a condensing plant to supply fresh water for the few who cursed their lot at being quartered on a few miles of rock and desert ; but that was all save for the Arab population, who haunted the European settlement like scavenger

dogs. Hervey messed with the E. T. staff, and asked ageless questions that nearly got him tumbled over Fort Head into the sea. Like Arthur Clennam, "he wanted to know," and nobody could inform him because it was nobody's business to find out. Where was the old city of the Phœnicians exactly, and why was it embedded amongst the Rocks rather than on the fine natural harbour of Fort Bay? Whence had the Phœnicians got their water, and, if there had been a considerable river to make Exile a port of such importance to them, where was that river now? Rivers large enough to float Phœnician galleys and form a trade route for their merchandise do not generally run dry or dwindle into mere pools.

To which the E. T. staff responded, "Dry up yourself, or get out!"

Hervey laughed, and went to dig in Reserve. There was an Arab village of sorts there, even in those days, and the Arabs could tell him more about the formation of the Rocks and their origin than the Europeans. Reserve plateau was the result of volcanic action, but the convulsion that had spewed up the Rocks in ages before that of the Phœnicians had not been followed by the extinction of the forces below, which a few million years later tore out a chasm in what were then green mountains, and poured boiling lava in sheets upon the face of the living earth, stilling it to death. Incidentally it had buried the Phœnician city and altered the course of the river, which had been swallowed up in the earth's wounded breast. The Arabs, however, showed Hervey traces of the old watercourse,

choked with volcanic dust and refuse and the *débris* washed down from the mountains, sometimes buried under the lava, but unmistakably there and leading through the rocky chain down to the coast.

"If we could recover the water supply it would make Exile second only to Malta!" said Hervey (it must be remembered that he was twenty-five). "We could have a floating dock. There's draught enough there for the biggest ship afloat. And we should have fresh water for a garrison. But where is the river?"

The Arabs pointed downwards, and showed him a further mystery. Six months before there had been a slight earthquake shock, not an unknown occurrence in Exile, but productive this time of fresh fissures in the Rocks. Since this had happened the surface of the Rocks which formed part of the chasm torn by the volcano was sometimes wet. It must have been the wall of the old river bed.

"The Phœnician city was on a lower level," said Hervey. "The lava overflowed the whole crater, and the convulsion shifted those solid rocks as a chess-player moves a pawn. The river's there still,—it runs right under the desert, and probably comes from the mountains in Arabia. After a rainfall the water level rises now, because the earthquake squeezed up some of the fissures in the rock and stopped the underflow of water, so that it had to dribble through higher up—somewhere. *That's* how the face of the rock gets wet."

It took him another month to find a vulnerable spot. The deposit of ages, assisted by the lava, had formed a cement almost as solid as the Rocks them-

selves, but Hervey knew that the earthquake must have opened a crack through which the patient, persistent water had worn its way drop by drop in search of its old channel. In the course of many more ages it might have worn its way through again, even if not assisted by some fresh convulsion of Nature. But when he became convinced of the existence of the river and of its possible recovery Hervey's task was only begun. If he tapped the river, at the spot which was the only one possible in that encasement of rock, it would pour down the face of the cliff and be quickly lost in the shifting sands of the coast beyond Fort Bay—a coast so dangerous that it made its own defences, but of no use for docking ships. The engineer handled water as a good horseman handles a horse—for his own purposes, and not its natural inclination. Guided by the wet rock faces he judged the depth of the river from the surface, and began to bore to find its distance from the face of the cliff. This was working by faith rather than by sight, and he bored four or five times before his patience was rewarded; but to carry the precious fresh water into the settlement of Reserve and further on to the telegraph station meant sinking a well and erecting a pumping station. Hervey went home with the river in his pocket, as it were, instead of oilfields, and offered the Government fresh water of life and a naval station from a barren wilderness. It was then that he learned the vitreous nature of departmental routine, which as a geologist should have interested him. He had thought himself a discoverer, and that he deserved praise from the Empire; but the Government of the day was not

pleased. It had sent Mr. Hervey to find oil as a paying investment, and it did not approve of young men who returned with schemes for a full-grown colony that would mean undoubted expenditure and a doubtful return for the capital invested. If Exile had not been of strategic value Hervey's boreholes might have remained as a monument to British imperturbability, but certain developments in the trade of the Gulf brought the grinning Rocks of Exile into ominous public notice. The young engineer became an unexpected authority, and went out again with a staff and facilities. Followed the waterworks and the dockyard—though the latter was not his job. His life work lay in Reserve, and his record was the group of flat-roofed buildings that looked like barracks designed by an Arab architect. It was not an obvious result for fifteen years of iron determination and tenacity; but the man's real achievement lay in the whole settlement of Fort Exile, the indirect result of a genius of will power and personality.

"When I look at the Fort and at Reserve, and at the docks and the garrison, I see Hervey," said Rodney Haines. "I don't need to be shown the waterworks and told how he recovered the river—he is everywhere. The Club is Hervey, and Government House, and the cutting through the Rocks. They all took their life from him, and are the outcome of his personality."

"But I think the waterworks are wonderful!" said Barbara, lifting shining eyes from the contemplation of Hervey's great cisterns and filter-tanks, out of which the water flowed into the main reservoir and

was carried thence by pipes into Reserve. The centrifugal pumps were worked by electricity, and it was for the more centralised position of his dynamos that Hervey had coveted Hassan's business premises in Reserve. The humming of the pumping engines and their motors made the waterworks seem a very vital spot in the heart of Exile, and Barbara gazed down fascinated from the starting platform above the throbbing, rhythmic machinery. "I love this—it's so alive!" she said. "Those engines, and the wells, and the water are the thing in itself after all—are they not, Mr. Haines?"

"No, they are only the result," he answered earnestly—too earnestly for her careless smile. "The thing in itself is really Hervey—it is the power that brings it all to life that really counts."

She shook her charming head. "I don't think so. I like results, not causes. When you play the violin it is your music that I enjoy, not the practice that you went through first."

"But the music is me!" he argued gently, with his eager eyes on her frank face. He so much wanted her to understand that his restless face sharpened with the effort. It was like teaching a child.

"I'm afraid I can't follow that," said Barbara, with a little laugh. "I must have something definite that I can see, or hear, or touch. I mean, it would not satisfy me to know that you were capable of playing the violin if you did not play it to me."

"If the gift is there it is bound to find expression," he said. "And the expression is only the materialising of oneself." Then his blue eyes grew almost wistful with a look that Mrs. Everard had often

noticed and that had gone to her heart. "You could not like my music without liking me, could you, because it is me?" he said coaxingly.

Barbara fixed her clear eyes on him for a minute as if considering the case. There was no shadow of a thought in them, nothing but the receptiveness of a child.

"Of course I like you!" she said kindly. "But I should like the music anyway, if any one else had played to me as well." She walked on over the bridge that led from the engine-houses to the men's quarters, and over Rodney Haines' heart as well, quite unconscious that he had dropped behind. "Mr. Hervey, I am so hungry!" she said. "Do you think I could get any halwa in the bazaars, or should I be poisoned? I like halwa."

"Barbara, you are a dreadful baby!" said Lady Stroud, laughing. "You are always munching or eating things all day. My husband gave her some halwa to taste," she explained to Hervey. "I think it filthy, but Barbara takes to it like a native."

"It's sweet," said Barbara serenely. "And it's only like rather bad apple paste."

"I can give you something better than halwa," said Hervey with the indulgence he showed to animals or children. "I ordered tea to be ready at my house, in case you and Lady Stroud would like some."

"Oh, how joyful!" said the girl, strolling along by his side as they made their way back to the car. "Have you a house in Reserve? I didn't know. Do you live here much? I thought every one lived in the Fort."

"I have an old Arab house, adapted to my needs. But I don't live here much—I only put up in Reserve when I am wanted on the spot. It is too hot to be pleasant in the town as a general rule."

She thought how nice he was, and how simple, though he was so clever and had done such wonderful things. Rodney Haines' constant appeal to her unawakened mind flattered her, and yet at the same time gave her the feeling of a child listening to longer words than it understands. Hervey had not said anything that was at all tiresome, in spite of being such an important person. But then Hervey was not yearning for a new intelligence to dawn in her kind, candid eyes and answer him soul to soul. She was to Hervey a pleasant girl who even liked halwa and would enjoy the tea he had provided. He wanted no more of her, if she had but known.

"It is such a relief to feel that one of those houses is *clean*!" said Lady Stroud as the motor set them down at a great carved door in the heart of the town. "How did you manage it, Mr. Hervey? I had to call on Al Sitt Indahu Hassan the other day, and the house is so stuffy, and I'm sure they never beat the dust out of the cushions!"

"It took a good month to get it sanitary," said Hervey, laughing. "I took it over from three families who had all camped here at once—poorer class Arabs, who lived with their goats and hens and cats all together, to say nothing of the babies."

"Disgusting! I have never been in the poorer

quarters ; I am not allowed, as the Governor's wife. But Mrs. Everard goes everywhere with the Mission sisters, and I believe they give her the most dreadful things to eat and drink."

"Worse than halwa ?" said Barbara gaily.

"I did not know that Mrs. Everard went in for mission work," said Hervey in an indescribable tone. Its venom was so subtle that Lady Stroud unconsciously began to apologise.

"I daresay they are a farce ; I don't believe any Mahomedan ever was converted to Christianity. But I believe Mrs. Everard only goes because she is interested in Arab life."

"How beautiful she is !" said Barbara almost fervently. For the first time her eyes grew dreamy, and something that was almost like a shy devotion altered her careless face. "I looked at her across the table last night, and I—I wanted to kiss her ! There is something so wonderful in the lift of her upper lip."

"Why, Barbara !" Lady Stroud laughed and the men smiled. The shadow on Haines' face vanished again, and he turned to the girl quickly as if pleased.

"I wonder if Mrs. Everard for one moment guessed what was passing in your mind ?" he said. "I thought she was looking rather depressed—ill—something."

"I am quite sure she never thought of Barbara or anyone else kissing her," said Lady Stroud positively. "I don't believe any one ever would, unless it were her husband."

"It seems unlikely," said Hervey, with the same

quality in his tone that had cheapened the mission work.

"Of course, one wouldn't *do* it," said Barbara, laughing and colouring, as if rather shocked. "But I should always want to."

"She has a beautiful mouth," said Haines kindly. "The upper lip is very short and finely cut, as Miss Playfair says. But she is so lifeless, or quiet, that she gives me an unhappy feeling."

"She can be awfully kind!" said Merryn unexpectedly. It was almost the first remark he had volunteered, and he turned rather pink as he said it. But after all, he had his reward. Barbara's eyes met his with the sudden appreciation and understanding that Haines had looked for in vain.

"Let us grant Mrs. Everard all the virtues. I am glad she is not here to demonstrate them, however," said Hervey coolly. "The presence of a goddess or an angel is apt to have a paralysing effect upon conversation. One can only pray or sing hymns in their presence."

"I was going to put you next to her at dinner last night," said Lady Stroud mischievously. "See what you escaped by not dining! You could not have prayed, and it would have interrupted the courses to sing hymns."

"I always thought she talked rather well, if she did get interested in a conversation," said Rodney Haines with his kindly smile. "When they first came out you used to discuss all sorts of things with her, Hervey."

"She was just fresh from Europe, and I read her

like the weekly papers," Hervey admitted. "That kind of intelligence never lasts in Exile. She is probably as dull as ditch-water now; but I can't say I speak from experience," he admitted. "Here's your tea at last, Miss Playfair."

They had entered the dark carved doorway as they talked, made their way up a flight of stairs lighted from above, and emerged into a kind of gallery opening out of a room that was screened off by carved woodwork. The gallery was really the sitting-room, and, like many Arab houses, it extended round a well that was open to the rainless skies, and made a shaft of light and air to the whole house. From the narrow space between this well and the wall opened small cupboards and bed places, but the gallery was wider between the shaft and the carved screen, and it was here that chairs had been set and Lady Stroud and Barbara sat down. A further staircase led up on to the roof, where the women's quarters had been, and where Hervey said he slept when in Reserve. The Arab servants had brought tea up from the kitchens, which were on the ground floor.

"You could have sat on a pile of cushions if it would increase the Arabian atmosphere, Miss Playfair," said Hervey as he handed her the delicious cakes and scones that his Arab cook had learned to make "after long grief and pain."

"Oh, why didn't I think of it!" said Barbara, laughing. "Only I should be sure to spill my tea."

Haines had sprung to a small couch against the wall, and was divesting it of cushions for her, his

action so light and boyish that Hervey appeared ponderous beside him when he walked into the room beyond, and returned laden with more cushions which he flung at the girl's feet. Haines and she together arranged them in a pile, and then with a little air of including him, Barbara handed her cup to Merryn while she slowly lowered herself on to the cushions and sat with her feet crossed under her. It seemed a perquisite of Mr. Merryn's position that people always gave him something to hold or to carry as consolation for not including him further.

"My legs are too long!" Barbara said, looking up at Haines with laughing eyes. "Are all Arabs short-legged people?"

"They don't wear modern skirts!" said the Colonial Secretary teasingly as he stooped and drew the linen skirt over the tip of a white canvas shoe. There was something almost reverential in the action, as he might have touched a shrine.

"I think one wants to be dressed for the part," said Lady Stroud. "You look far more European sitting on the floor, Babs, than you did on a chair."

It was one of Lady Stroud's most lovable characteristics that she never suggested that people were doing improper things. If her niece liked to sit on a pile of cushions in Hervey's house she treated it as part of the entertainment, and did not throw the shadow of the Governor's lady over the laughing scene. Barbara ate her tea on her improvised seat, waited on by Rodney Haines and the silent Merryn, and Lady Stroud talked to her host.

She did not know that Hervey's keen, sleepy eyes were quite as cognisant of the faces of all three as her own.

"Haines has got it badly," thought the Government engineer, without hesitating over a suspicion that was only just beginning to make Lady Stroud uneasy. "He's simply leaping into love with every ordinary thing that girl says or does. It's the first time for him, and he's going to be very sick before he's through." Then it occurred to him that the education of being in love was a process that completed the artist in man, and he was ruthlessly pleased because there had always been one thing wanting in Haines' music—a vague seeking, a falling short, that Hervey had felt. It lacked inspiration for all its perfection, and this horrible thing that was going to happen to him might prove the magic touch needful to complete it. Hervey was perfectly aware that to a nature like Rodney Haines' there might be much ecstasy in store and infinite pain. He vaguely pitied the fellow, but for himself he hoped that it might improve his music. Hervey possessed the cold-blooded fervour of the critic untrammelled by any experience in the ordeal awaiting Haines.

After tea they went up on the roof to show Barbara where the women mostly lived in Arab households. It was a large, flat space, surrounded by little walls some five or six feet high, and open to the sky. It was impossible to see down into the streets save through the narrowest slits in the walls, carefully grated in; and this was all the means the Mahomedan ladies had of observing the

world outside their own homes. Yet nothing happened within their sphere of vision that escaped them, and for rumours further off they had an unfailing source of supply in their household servants.

"What a dreadful, shut-in-life!" said Barbara with a shudder, bending her tall head to one of the little eyelet holes and peering through. "How can they bear it? Has there never been a revolt of women amongst the Arabs?"

"My dear, they like it!" said Lady Stroud, laughing. "They are the goods and chattels of one fat, turbaned man who boxes them up here with some henna to put on their nails, and some gold tinsel to make embroidery, and that queer powder that scents their clothes, and they are as pleased as Punch. Revolt! No—the more they are shut up the more they give themselves airs."

"It must be intolerable!" said the English girl, with her head flung back to look at the free sky overhead.

"They are in love with the master of the house, you see!" Haines reminded her.

"They can't all be in love with him."

Haines laughed. "A rich Arab has no more than four wives, and the rest of the females in his women's quarters are generally widows of his relations, or his own sisters or mother. They all live very happily together."

"Yes, but—I couldn't be happy with any man unless I were free!"

"That is presupposing that you will always love freedom better than any man."

She looked at him with puzzled blue eyes. Mr. Haines was beginning to be clever again, and she did not understand her own sentences when transposed like that.

"I should be so *bored*!" she said quite frankly.

The sudden darkening of Haines' eyes might have meant laughter—or tragedy. He laid her cloak round her shoulders, for Lady Stroud was ready to go, and the movement was almost as if he enveloped or protected her from something worse than the night wind.

"You shall not be bored," he said lightly. "We will all see to it that you have the whole world for your playground, and no single Arab shall shut you up on the roof!"

Barbara paused for a minute to allow Lady Stroud to get into the motor first. The dust lay thick upon the outside of the car, as it always did in Exile after a few miles, and as the girl put her foot on the step Lieutenant Merryn leaned forward and placed his hand over the guard to save her white skirt. The little courtesy must have made him very dirty, since he was not wearing gloves, and he was an instinctively clean young man; but perhaps the dust on his fingers in Miss Playfair's service was as much a consolation as holding her tea-cup. He said nothing, but took his seat last in the car, and they drove away, Haines still talking to Barbara. She had not even been aware of the saving of her skirt from the dust.

Richmond Hervey was standing in his own doorway to watch them depart, and was an appreciative witness. He flung up his square shaven

chin, and laughed with genuine humour as he went to his own car, which was waiting behind the Governor's. Merryn's little unrequited service struck him as extremely ironical and rather suggestive. Why should a man take the trouble to keep a woman's skirts clean if she did not do so for herself? And she had never even thanked him!

"Poor devil!" said Hervey grimly. "And that's part of his honorary duties. A.D.C. ought to stand for 'A Damnable Commission.'"

He had enjoyed the afternoon, and the presence of two women whom he could honestly like pleased him in his own house. Lady Stroud was deservedly popular in Exile; Barbara Playfair had the effect on men of a clean wind, or a mass of garden flowers, or the upraised face of a child,—even on Hervey she brought a quieting influence as of something rather happy that had happened near him, though not belonging to his own life. He wondered, if he had had a young sister, whether he could have borne to see her in Exile, whether he could have guarded her enough; for, like all men who have been conventionally immoral, he was horribly afraid of such evil coming near his own womenkind. Physical things had grown to have an exaggerated value to him, so that he could not realise that to women like Lady Stroud or girls like Barbara they hardly existed on the level of everyday. It needed the shock of a tragedy to force the question of sex upon their consciousness, and their indifference was their safeguard. Hervey would almost have isolated a girl on the roof in the Arab fashion against which Barbara had protested, because his own deeds had

made mankind a menace, though he knew that personally he would have faced death rather than allow a breath of harm to touch such a girl. And then suddenly in his thoughts he saw Lieutenant Merryn's action in another light—the strong, clean hand shielding the girl's white skirts from the dust of the car. That sort of thing was not done for a reward, though she had not thanked him.

CHAPTER VI

“ Wife of my foe thus pleading before me,
There seemed no wrong ;
With my mad passions that stifled and tore me,
Who could be strong ? ”

DORA SIGUSON SHORTER.

THE Government engineer got into the driver's seat of his car and took her gently out into the busy streets of the town. It was growing dusk, and he found it necessary to sound the warning note of his horn to clear the parti-coloured crowd out of his way, just as Mrs. Everard's driver had rung his silver bells. Hervey was going down to the Chief Justice's bungalow now, to keep his appointment with Mrs. Everard. He drove slowly—partly because he did not want to overtake the Government House party in front and apprise them of where he was going, partly because he wanted time to arrange his thoughts and get his statements against Everard clearly in his mind. He shook off the kinder influence of the past hour and hardened his heart, for he was quite certain that Mrs. Everard had been in ignorance of her husband's mishandling of justice, and if she were still in ignorance he meant to spare her no detail. He could not himself have told why a savage desire to crush and wound this particular woman had taken possession of him,

but he dimly realised that it had waited in the background of his mind for many a long day, and that he rejoiced when the opportunity was put into his hands. He remembered her composed white face last night when she had asked for the interview, and the dazed grief in her eyes. Those eyes were the only thing that betrayed her, for her face was like a mask, even the beautiful curved lips being under complete control. She was a curious woman ; he wondered how she would take it—whether the stabs of the accusations he could make would bring any convulsion of her calm, whether he could draw blood and make her wince. There was a certain horrible excitement in the mere anticipation, and he dwelt upon it with loathsome fascination. He did not mean to spare her one revolting fact—she had never spared him the gall of her silent aloofness and superiority, though she did not know it. He thought it very likely that she did not know it, and had merely passed him by as something immaterial and undesirable ; but he hated her none the less.

By the time Hervey's car rounded the foot of the Rocks and turned up the ascent to the Everards' bungalow the lights were coming out in Exile. They shone like pale stars here and there amongst the lower slopes of the Rocks, with a galaxy for the garrison, and an electric crown for Government House. The " Luna " purred with a deep vibration up the hill, and Mrs. Everard heard it coming through the open windows of the drawing-room. When Hervey was announced she was sitting at the writing-table with her head leaning on her hand, a

pile of written chits beside her, and her thoughtful eyes reading a list of engagements propped up beside the inkstand. The lights were up in the dining-room beyond the pillars, but only one lamp was turned on over Mrs. Everard's head to enable her to see. As Hervey entered he noticed the light on the dull gold of her hair and the curve of her neck and shoulders. She was wearing a dark transparent gown, and had already dressed for dinner, though it was not much after six.

"I am afraid I am late," he said with rigid politeness. "I was showing Lady Stroud and her niece over the waterworks, and they stayed to tea at my house in Reserve. I came straight down when they left."

"It does not matter," she answered in a perfectly level voice. "I dressed early, to feel myself free to talk to you when you should arrive. Won't you sit—there?" She made a motion to the chair nearest the writing table—a polished wood chair substantially made, for Hervey's great frame demanded something more than basket-work furniture—and he sat down. As he did so she was distracted by a horrible feeling of still hearing the purring hum of his car coming up the hill, and realised that she had sat and listened for it in such tension that the sound at last had been burnt in on her brain. She wondered how long, after he was gone,—after it was all over,—she should still hear that motor coming up the hill, and turning into the compound. . . .

Hervey was looking at her with his critical, level-lidded eyes. He speculated whether anything would ever disturb that quiet face, the lowered screen of

thick lashes over the eyes, the short curve of the superb upper lip; he laid a bet with himself that if he could take her pulse it would not be hurrying one jot—yet.

“ My business with you to-night is purely—business, Mr. Hervey,” said Mrs. Everard deliberately. She was looking straight in front of her, and did not turn her serious eyes in his direction as she spoke, while her head still rested on her hand as before, the chin supported in her palm. “ You hold a certain letter of my husband’s, which was written—in error.”

“ The Chief Justice paid me the unmerited compliment of judging me by his own standards ! ” he said with a kind of ghastly irony.

She bent her head a little, as if in tired assent. “ It was an error,” she repeated. “ He admits that. May I ask, before I go further, if you have answered the letter ? ”

“ No,” he said curtly. “ It was a letter which will answer itself, in time.”

“ Have you destroyed it ? ”

“ I am sorry you think me a fool, Mrs. Everard ! ”

There was a pause after the harsh sarcasm. Then he spoke in his turn.

“ Do you know what was in that letter ? ”

“ No, I have not read it,” she said patiently. She had never once looked at him, and yet she knew every ugly alteration in his face—anger, contempt, disbelief in her, vindictive revenge, she could have counted them over as they altered the deep lines round his mouth and eyes.

“ Your husband asked me to join him in a syndicate to control and monopolise the silk trade,” said

Hervey deliberately. "As you know, it is illegal for Government officials to enter into large trading transactions here, more especially with the Arabs in Exile. Ali Hassan was one of the syndicate—the principal member, I understand; and the Chief Justice and I are both Government officials. Mr. Everard thought his proposition balanced, however, by the fact that I was already in secret a director of Moses, Kalif & Co., the Jewish agents. In this he had been misinformed, but he was so sure of it that he used it as a threat to ensure my consent. If I did not agree to join the silk combine he was going to expose my connection with the banking agency and their money-lending methods, with which he was quite conversant. I wish you to understand me thoroughly, Mrs. Everard!"

"I understand you thoroughly!"

"Perhaps it is necessary to inform you that I never had any connection with any Arab or Jewish firms in Exile. As a rule it would be quite unnecessary to state that of any decent Englishman, but your husband having explained his own standard to me, I think it better to inform you."

"Yes," she said simply.

For a minute he hesitated. If he had not hated her he thought he would have cynically admired her lifeless composure and the perfectly modulated voice. It was impossible to tell what she thought or felt, or how much she acquiesced in Everard's blackguardism. If she were his accomplice throughout she was calm through preknowledge of what he had to say; and yet somehow he guessed that she had been ignorant, until this minute, of all that had

taken place. Her composure was a thing almost beyond his imagination for a woman to assume.

"In order that I might appreciate all the advantages of the silk combine, however, the Chief Justice took me into his confidence with a frankness that shows how entirely he believed that I was in his power. He told me in that letter which he sent 'in error' that the whole of the trade was practically in our hands, or would be. As he had removed Lestoc, Arabi, and Raschid Taima, our most serious rivals, so he would get rid of Azopardi & Co., the only firm of importance left. There was a warrant out against them already for contempt of court—the same dodge he played on Arabi."

She interrupted him for the first time. "Wait a moment—I do not understand. The case of Arabi was for libel——"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Everard, it was for contempt of court, and was managed in this wise. When Lestoc was made a bankrupt on the cabled word of a man in Bombay, public opinion was pretty freely expressed, but as the officials are not in the silk trade Mr. Everard ignored it. Jacobs, however, went into Arabi's office after the conviction and said to him, 'What do you think of this sentence of the Chief Justice? Rather severe, isn't it?' Arabi, who was a friend of Lestoc's, flamed up into indignation and denounced the Chief Justice as a scoundrel. Jacobs had his clerk with him as a witness. 'That's enough,' he said. 'I'm going over to the court-house to lay information against you. It's contempt of court.' He went over to the court-house, where Mr. Everard awaited him. It was a planned

thing. Arabi was in gaol next week and fined a thousand rupees—just at a time when his small business happened to be in a crucial condition, as the ‘silk combine’ knew. Very simple, isn’t it, Mrs. Everard?”

“Go on.”

“You will see that Mr. Everard had reason to say that he could, or would, remove all rivals out of our way. He had already done so in various cases. That public opinion which I mentioned, however, was a spoke in the wheel of trade success, and to give the syndicate a good basis he paid me the compliment of thinking that there was no name so good as mine to have on the directorate. That is the gist of his letter, Mrs. Everard. It is all stated with that lucidity and legal plainness for which Mr. Everard is justly notorious.”

For a minute there was silence. Mrs. Everard seemed to be taking in his statement. Then she turned to him for the first time, and with a little odd thrill of triumph he saw that there was an unusual stain of colour in her face, as if some one had flicked the angry blood into it under the torture of a whip. Her eyes looked almost wine-coloured as she turned them on him, but there was not the least quiver in her face except for a little pulse that seemed to be beating in her cheek. He watched it with a very cruelty of pleasure.

“And what price do you put upon the letter?” she said steadily. “I am empowered to offer you anything, without hesitation. There is a site, I think, you want in Reserve for the power station. Would *that* count?”

For a minute he was so furious with anger that he could not answer her. That having failed in the bribe of great wealth—for the silk combine was a magnificent trust scheme—Everard should dare to offer him another bribe, or unlimited bribery, struck him as intolerable. The Chief Justice was judging him still by himself, and the insult reached Hervey like a blow between the eyes. He wanted to strike back at the man, brutally and physically, but Everard was not here—he was skulking behind this impassive figure of his wife empowered to offer any price to the man who thought himself above prices. The only way of striking at the husband was through the wife, and he felt the rush of his passion in all his veins as he set his will to crush them both in one fierce sweep of contempt and scorn. The woman's beautiful, still face maddened him too. Everard was a cur—he would have cringed. But here was something opposing him almost worthy of the blow he meant to deal.

He rose deliberately from his chair, and leaned his hand on the writing-table, bending a little towards Claudia Everard with his stone-grey eyes on her face.

"The site for the power station is not bribe enough, Mrs. Everard!" he said with a slow smile. His voice was as cold and steady as her own.

"Is there anything we *can* offer?" She ranged herself unconsciously on her husband's side. "You can name your price, Mr. Hervey."

"You are empowered to offer—*anything*, Mrs. Everard?"

She bent her head almost breathlessly.

“ Even—yourself ? ”

In the silence that followed the word the little pulse in her cheek seemed to beat almost audibly. Her eyes had shifted from his when he rose and stood over her, but she had not shrunk. The colour in her face, however, faded and left her as white as she usually was, and her curved lips looked the redder by contrast.

“ I am empowered to offer anything,” she repeated tonelessly after a full minute ; and even as she spoke she remembered the panic terror in her husband’s face as he had hurled the words at her. Had *he* thought of this meaning, too ?

“ The decision, however, rests with you,” Hervey said with the same mockery of courtesy. “ In your gift you have the only bribe I will take.”

“ That—is your ultimatum ? ”

“ Yes.”

She hesitated, and then to his amazement spoke as collectedly as if discussing a mere business proposition. Would he ever understand this woman ? Was she a great criminal, or a martyr, or something of a genius ?

“ You forget,” she said slowly, “ that even if I conceded that bribe it would be impossible for me to——”

For the first time her voice died in her throat, but her face was as set as marble.

“ The details are not so very difficult,” he said with a cynical shrug, and even while he was speaking he was surprised at the ease with which he sketched a plan that he had never dreamed of until the moment when he looked for an insult.

"There is my bungalow in the desert, and Hassan's Half-way House opposite. What more natural than that you should go out to Half-way House for change of air—or you can go to meet your husband on his return from Health if you like, and by some alteration of his plans he does not arrive!" His clean-shaven lips showed the betraying sneer. "Hassan's house is only partly furnished—not always ready for chance visitors. Under the circumstances you would, of course, come to me, and—my hospitality is at your service!"

One great shudder seemed to convulse her from head to foot. She pushed back her chair and rose abruptly, but even now she did not falter, though she did not look him in the face.

"Yes, I see," she said quietly. Then, "That is the only price you will take for the letter?"

"That is the only price." The finality of his tone was intentionally brutal.

She moved back from him a pace, that was all. Her eyes had never met his again since he made his proposition, and she turned from him now as if the subject were ended—for the time.

"I cannot answer you on the instant. Will you give me twenty-four hours?"

"I am going cruising with the Admiral to-morrow," he said quietly, almost casually. "I shall be away a week. You can write your answer for my return."

"Where am I to address it?" she said, and there seemed some difficulty in the words. He wondered why, when her control had been so marvellous up to now.

“ To my bungalow in the desert, please. I shall be there for some days after my return,” he said slowly and significantly. “ Good-night, Mrs. Everard ! ”

He did not offer her his hand. He walked straight across the drawing-room and out of the door, leaving her standing by the writing-table. She lifted her eyes once as he passed through the doorway, and they rested for a minute on his shoulders and the back of his massive grey head. In the dead white mask of her face they were alight and alive. His heavy footfall died out through the echoing bungalow, where there were neither curtains nor draperies to deaden the sound ; but in her ears, much clearer than his tread, was the sound of his approaching motor as she had heard it coming up the hill, and long after the real sound of it had died away into distance, taking him with it, she still heard it approach with a humming purr that grew louder and louder in her ears until she felt that it would deafen her to every other noise for evermore.

•

CHAPTER VII

“ Love is for no planet and no race.
The Summer of the heart is late or soon,
The fever in the blood is less or more ;
But while the moons of time shall fill and wane,
While there is earth below and heaven above,
Wherever man is true and woman fair,
Through all the circling cycles Love is Love ! ”

SYDNEY DOBELL.

“ A pretty woman left too much alone,
Her husband playing her the traitor’s part—
A child misunderstood—a horse misused—
These wrong God’s Universe, and break my heart.

“ The sin of those who sit in council seats
And bring red ruin on the helpless throng—
The market places thronged with living girls——”

“ BARBARA ! ” called Lady Stroud, entering the drawing-room with an armful of ostrich feathers.
“ Jacobs has brought these things for us to choose from. My dear, where *did* you get that song ? ”

“ I brought it out from home, Aunt Fanny,” said Barbara, swinging her long body round on the music stool.

“ I don’t think it’s very nice. I never heard you sing it before.”

“ I don’t know it yet,” said Barbara indifferently.
“ The third verse is rather pretty.”

“ But, my dear, the words ! I can’t think what

is the matter with modern songs. It isn't only on the gramophone," she added, laughing; "but children like you stand up and sing the most dreadful things under excuse of their being set to music."

"I never thought about the words," said Barbara, opening her great clear eyes, as empty as the blue sky overhead. "Except the third verse, and that's about children leaving wild flowers to die on the roads. You know how they pick them and then throw them away. I can never bear to see it."

"Yes," said Lady Stroud a little doubtfully. "Well, I think I shouldn't sing the second verse at all if I were you. You haven't sung it to anybody, have you?" she added a trifle anxiously.

"No." Barbara shook her charming head. "I haven't learnt it yet, and you are all so critical!" She left the piano and came over to the sofa, where Lady Stroud had deposited the feathers. "Oh, Aunt Fanny, how topping!" she said, lifting the long undressed plumes in her hand. Lady Stroud motioned to a native trader waiting between the pillars in the distance, and he came forward noiselessly on his bare feet and stood looking from one to the other of the English ladies with cunning eyes. He was an Arab Jew, with a little scanty beard and aquiline features, but he had something of the Arab grace if more of the subtilty of Judah.

"Now, Jacobs, you are to sell to Miss Playfair as you would to me!" said Lady Stroud warningly. She was the best bargainer in Exile, and she knew the value of the feathers and silks and curios as well as the dealers. They did not attempt to cheat Lady Stroud, accepting her with as much respect

as a fellow rogue ; but she paid fair prices and expected the best for her money.

"What price are they?" she asked, lifting the long white bunch of feathers that had enraptured Barbara. There were four to the bunch, but when dressed they would only make two plumes of any thickness.

"Twenty-eight rupees, ya siyyidha!" said the Jew with a smile amongst the wrinkles of his old face. He smiled very suddenly, and the next moment the seriousness of the Oriental had settled down on his face again and made it almost sad.

"Twenty-eight rupees—that's about seventeen and six each for your two feathers, Barbara," said Lady Stroud practically. "You would have to give four or five pounds for such beauties at home. These are not joined—they are all one feather. Well, do you want any?"

"Oh, Aunt Fanny, I should love them! And those dear little Marabout tips, and the natural ostrich!"

"Don't ruin yourself," said her aunt, laughing. "That's about three pounds' worth you have chosen—rather less, because the Marabout are cheap. I want some white feathers myself. Those are not long enough, Jacobs."

"I will send up more, ya siyyidha. I expect fresh feathers in to-day."

"They come over from Somaliland," Lady Stroud explained. "Very well, Jacobs, send me up a bunch as good as Miss Playfair's. Have you your purse, Barbara? Jacobs has one price, and I never try to beat him down as I should another man. You

had better pay him now, or I will lend you the money."

"No, Aunt Fanny, I'll pay—wait a minute." She ran off into her own room, returning with the silver netted bag and the bargain was settled. Lady Stroud had been unconsciously urgent that the purchase of the feathers should be over and done with while the Colonial Secretary was absent on his duties. She was uncomfortably aware that Mr. Haines had a marked tendency to pay for anything and everything that her niece admired and to make her a present of it. He did it so eagerly and gracefully that it was difficult to scold him, and well nigh impossible for the girl to refuse. As long as it was only little camel bells and filigree brooches it had not much mattered, but when it expanded into gold tissue and embroidered silks it ran into a number of rupees that Lady Stroud could not countenance. Some connection in her sub-conscious mind between her husband's deputy and Barbara's purchases made her say suddenly, "I thought Mr. Haines was with you. What has become of him?"

"Why, he had to be in the office this morning, Aunt Fanny—he told you so at breakfast!"

"Of course—I forgot. And he is lunching with Major Dalkeith, who is in command of the Marine Light Infantry here. Do you remember when he will be back, Barbara? There is that polo match this afternoon; we must have an escort. If he can't come I must send for Dr. Bride."

"I think—I mean he said—he would be up soon after lunch," faltered the girl, reddening. It was inevitable that she should redden, the Colonial

Secretary's desire to return to Government House as long as she was in it being too patent for concealment. And Rodney Haines was not concealing anything. He had not walked into love in his sober senses, as men of his age might be supposed to do. He had rushed into it with a velocity that had left nobody any breathing space. The *Silverside* had been gone for four days, carrying the Admiral, his Flag-Captain and Chief of Staff, the Flag-Lieutenant, the Secretary, and the Government engineer with her, and Mr. Haines had been Acting-Governor during that period and in consequence in residence at Government House. It was one of the vagaries of Fate that he was in such a position, for the man who should have been Acting-Governor in the Admiral's absence was, strictly speaking, the senior military officer, who was in command of the Marine Artillery. But Colonel Damer had an unfortunate taste for cocktails at the Club that had resulted in a bout of fever, and the Admiral with great relief had snatched at the excuse for putting Rodney Haines in his place. It seems a far cry from Colonel Damer and his pirate-swizzles to the new wine of love ; but the fact remains that they were the indirect cause of hastening matters for the Colonial Secretary. He had had the advantage of being under the same roof as Barbara, of meeting her at meals, of seeing how she looked from the time she got up in the morning to the time she went to bed at night, and he had gone headlong into that mysterious experience of soul and body which we call "being in love," and was plunging deeper and deeper with each hour that passed.

It was impossible that either Lady Stroud or Barbara could be blind to the state of affairs, though they might ignore it at present. Poor Lady Stroud felt the agitation of the whirlwind that seemed to be enveloping Government House even though the Colonial Secretary had not made open love to the girl—she did him that justice.

“He is a nice man,” she said to herself in the midst of her worry. “And of course he is quite eligible and satisfactory as to his family. But I do wish it had not happened quite so soon, or when Jonathan was away! Only a week in Exile and this tiresome man on the verge of a declaration to her, poor child. If it had happened a month or so hence, now——”

Unfortunately love is a fever which cannot be pre-dated or deferred like other engagements. If it is never the right time to be ill it is hardly more so to fall in love. Even Rodney Haines would not himself have chosen the suddenness with which his fate had come upon him had he been asked. He had been comfortably immune for thirty-eight years of his life, save for burning his fingers at a married woman's shrine when he was assistant secretary in a minor colony, and had been regarded as very charming and very hopeless by mothers with marriageable daughters. He had only been six months in Exile when Barbara Playfair walked into the Club and straight into his heart, and he had not been bound to any woman's chariot wheels during that time. A “dear fellow” was what they said of him—a little baffled by his ready courtesy that was almost devotion and his attentions that

were almost a flirtation. He was thought to be able to take care of himself ; he thought so himself until he found that all his manhood yearned to one slight, long-limbed girl sitting opposite him at meals in tantalising suggestion of domesticity.

The chief difficulty in the situation was Barbara. Lady Stroud had not the least idea how the girl was herself taking the matter—whether she were attracted or whether she were simply a little flattered. She looked at her now, with that flush in her cheeks as she gathered up the beautiful white feathers and buried her face in them with a childish effort to disguise the blush. She was nineteen ; it struck Lady Stroud with a shock that the Colonial Secretary was exactly twice her age. But then he looked so young, and that eager boyish air had been so pronounced of late. Really at times he seemed younger than Barbara, who could be rather solemn.

“ You had better put your feathers in a tin case and have them sealed up,” she said as her niece was carrying them off. “ You can’t get them dressed or mounted out here.”

Barbara hesitated, and the blood deepened in her face ; but she looked at Lady Stroud with young eyes like pools of water. “ I wanted to show them to Mr. Haines,” she said bravely. “ He asked me to show him if I bought anything ——”

“ Oh,” said Lady Stroud with a feeling of being nonplussed. “ You can show them to him after luncheon then, and my *ayah* shall pack them up for you later.”

Barbara nodded and turned away, the feathers in her hand. As she crossed the polished floors to her

own room Lady Stroud heard her humming, and then suddenly her voice broke out into the song she had been singing :

“ The market-places thronged with living girls—
These make the scheme of all Creation wrong.

“ For oh to see the bluebells, idly plucked,
Flung in the roadway where the cattle trod !—
I find my Heaven turned a Court of law,
Man the defendant, and the plaintiff, God.”

“ She is nothing but a baby ; she has not understood a word of that hateful song,” said Lady Stroud, exasperated. “ Children throwing wild flowers away, indeed ! I shall give Mr. Haines a hint to tell her that her voice is not suited to the music. No, that’s not fair to her ; I shall tell her exactly what it means.”

At half-past two the Colonial Secretary drove back to Government House, and sprang out of the car with an impetuosity that suggested ominous haste to Lady Stroud. He came in with the halting gait that ought to have been a limp, and brought his pathetic, crippled face with that new radiance on it into the sunshine of his lady’s presence. Barbara was sitting on the arm of the deep sofa, balancing her long body and smoking a cigarette while she discussed the advisability of going to rest until a quarter to four, when they started for the polo ground.

“ If I sleep in the day I get up about four and wander out to the compound—I do really, Aunt Fanny ! ” she said. “ And I met the most enormous Arab carrying a pail of water, and he thought I was a ghost and poured the water all over himself ! I’d put a white wrapper over my pyjamas, you see ;

and I suppose I did look rather—Oh, here is Mr. Haines! Now I can show him the feathers.”

She was gone before Lady Stroud could recover her breath, and returned almost as soon with the dear possession, which she waved triumphantly before the Colonial Secretary.

“Are they not beautiful? I bought them this morning,” she said. “And the old Jew was such a dear, with corkscrew curls and bleary eyes. He made me out a bill in Arabic—look!”

“Why did you buy these without me?” said Haines jealously. “I wanted to give you some.” He took the feathers that Barbara had been stroking against her fresh face and laid them as if absently against his own. Lady Stroud felt as if events were moving rapidly, and had a sensation as of guiding a runaway horse in her position of restraining Mr. Haines’ emotions.

“I think you have given Barbara quite enough presents,” she said decidedly. “She wanted to buy these for herself. And my dear child,” she added, turning to the girl, “what do you mean about going out of doors at four o’clock? You really mustn’t do that kind of thing amongst native servants!”

“But I was so wide awake, Aunt Fanny! And it’s so tiresome to lie in bed and remember what happened yesterday. I do hate thinking over yesterday, and I never do unless I lie awake.”

“The evening’s amusement evidently does not bear the morning’s reflection!” said Haines teasingly. “Why didn’t you come and knock us all up to amuse you?”

“I knew Aunt Fanny was tired, and I never

thought of you," said Barbara composedly. "Oh, Aunt Fanny"—her lips began to curl with delighted mischief—"your *ayah* was so shocked at my wearing pyjamas instead of a nightdress! She thought I had stolen Uncle Jonathan's. She wouldn't believe they were mine."

"Well, it is a little unusual!" said Lady Stroud, rather put out, for Haines had thrown his head back like a schoolboy and was laughing. "We have not adopted them out here, for women. Does your mother approve, Barbara?"

"Not a bit," said the girl, laughing in her turn. "She thinks it's fast. She thinks that everything that is hygienic is fast—she would like me to sleep with all the windows shut."

"She would think us past praying for in Exile, then!" said Lady Stroud with a rather vexed laugh. "For we have no windows—only jalousies." She wished that she could get away from the pyjama subject anyway—it sounded so intimate. And yet Barbara, with a cigarette in her mouth, talking of pyjamas or anything else, could never be fast. Mrs. Playfair was wrong—the girl carried her character in her eyes. "Well, anyhow, you must go and rest if you don't sleep," she added, rising. "We have some people dining here to-night, and I don't want you to look washed out."

"Mayn't Miss Playfair sit up a little longer?" asked Haines with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "If she is a very good girl, and I promise to look after her? I've only just come back, and I've been working like the proverbial nigger (the real one *doesn't!*) all the morning."

But his urgency was, unintentionally, Lady Stroud's best advocate. Barbara took sudden fright at a *tête-à-tête* and became amenable. "I've got to write some letters—I shall write in my room," she said, passing her arm through Lady Stroud's and pressing against her unconsciously, so that the elder woman felt the leap of a startled heart. "It is only that Aunt Fanny wants to make me lie down, and I hate it!"

Perhaps he felt that this sudden avoidance of him was a good omen, for he did not urge his plea. Only at four o'clock, when the motor came round to take them out to polo, the intolerable happiness in his face caused the Governor's wife a deeper dismay, and she began to calculate the days—no, hours, minutes—that lay between her and the crisis she was inclined to postpone. When a man begins to look as if heaven were round the next corner, it is time to think of the rate at which he means to get there.

The polo ground at Exile is some way out in the desert, on the road to Hervey's bungalow. It is a level stretch of sand, boundaried by little red flags that remind one of golf more than the mounted game, and it is open to all the winds of the world. There is a tent in which the men can re-adjust disordered costumes, and a line of ponies under the superintendence of Arab grooms. Also there is a board on two trestles and several dozens of ginger-beer bottles and lemonade, under the control of an old Somali who sits on his heels and makes money thereby. He is all the refreshment that the Polo Club know, and after the match he packs his

goods on the back of a waiting camel and returns with them to Reserve, issuing forth with a new stock on the next polo afternoon. The popping of ginger-beer bottles behind the tent was as familiar a sound at Exile polo as the click of the sticks on the balls.

Lady Stroud's party found two other motors already on the scene when they arrived—Dr. Bride's, with the American consul and his wife, and Major Dalkeith's. The cars stood in the open desert just beyond the tent, and there was no shelter anywhere or laws of limitation. If the whole population of the Fort or Reserve had liked to come out and squat in the sand to watch the game there was nothing to stop them. But the Arab has his business as well as the Englishman, and it does not consist in playing with a ball.

"I always think it would be so much more appropriate if they could train camels to the game!" said Lady Stroud, tying her hat on a little more firmly with her motor veil. The wind was blowing hard, and every now and then little pyramids of sand whirled up in the further spaces of the desert and fell in tiny ridges. She spoke to Dr. Bride, who had come up to lean on the door of the car and watch the play from there. Barbara was too absorbed in the game already to attend to anything else.

"What awful sticks you would want!" he responded, laughing. "Think of the back-hander behind his hump!"

"And the riding off!" added Haines. "Who is playing to-day, Bride?"

"Two mixed teams. They've got a native officer on a rippin' good pony. There he goes!"

"Beautiful!" said Lady Stroud admiringly, as the graceful rider cantered past. "Isn't that Mr. Yarrow on the grey?"

"Yes; he and the Vanburens came down with me."

"I noticed that Mr. Yarrow had a bad cut over his eye last polo day," said Lady Stroud, levelling her glasses. "Was that from a fall?"

"I wasn't called in if it were! I can only refer you to the R.A.M.C."

"I hardly liked to sympathise about it, because one never knows what it comes from," said Lady Stroud confidentially. "So many of them look as if they had been in battle after St. Patrick's night! Not that Mr. Yarrow is an Irishman, but it seems to me that the younger men fight indiscriminately."

"It's human natur, p'r'aps—if so,
Oh, isn't human natur' low!"

quoted Haines dryly. "Puppies are always worrying each other—helps 'em to cut their wisdom teeth!"

"Yes, only it seems so childish. If it were at Eton now—but I never ask questions."

"Lady Stroud, you're an angel of understanding. Ah, they're off!"

The bell had rung—a tiny cracked sound in the vastness of the unwall'd desert—and the ball had been thrown in. The chukker started somewhat poorly, but the pace worked up under the stimulus

of the forward players. It was a fairly fast game, for the beaten sand was hard and true. Barbara leaned forward breathlessly, her soul dawning in her eyes. Action was the medium through which she expressed her personality rather than thought, and the open air her element. She looked upon games as sacred. Lady Stroud watched her rather curiously, and watched Haines too. He could not keep his soul out of his face, after the manner of most Englishmen ; it kept welling up in his eyes, and his eyes were generally resting on the girl.

“ He will speak very soon ”—thought Lady Stroud. “ He would speak this afternoon if he could get her away from the rest of us ; but I do not think there is the least excuse for him to ask her to leave the car ! ”

She looked round the empty world, and found nothing in the wall-less desert, the ginger-beer bottles, or the line of ponies to befriend a lover. Barbara appeared absorbed in the game and unaware of Haines’ proximity, though he sat next her in rather touching patience for her chance word or wish. It was Dr. Bride who really addressed her with some amusement at her absorption.

“ You like polo, Miss Playfair ? ”

“ I love it ! ” said the girl, turning a flushed face to him. The wind had loosened her brown hair in spite of the motor veil, and a lock was tossing to and fro between her eyes and her hat brim. “ I enjoyed going to Hurlingham last season better than anything ! ”

“ Better than dancing ? ”

"Yes, on the whole. I love dancing, of course, but it is always in hot rooms, and there isn't enough space at most people's houses, and you get sleepy and tired. Hurlingham was just topping!" Her eyes shone like lapis lazuli.

"If you were a man, would you play?" asked Haines. He did not care for polo himself. He could ride, but he had never found his hobby in physical exercise.

"Wouldn't I!"

"I have seen ladies play, fairly well too," said Dr. Bride. "We must get Miss Playfair a pony and rig her up."

Lady Stroud intervened. It savoured too much of Barbara's pyjamas, and she somehow dreaded some boyish reference. Barbara's long legs seemed always walking her into danger. "The difficulty is to get ponies in Exile," she said. "This hiring remounts system of ours is borrowed from Aden, but it seems to work pretty well. What do you pay a chukker, Dr. Bride?"

"One rupee. I believe the Aden fellows pay more, but I don't know. It's cheaper to pay for the Government ponies than to keep your own in Exile, anyway."

"Would you like a gallop in the desert? We could manage that one morning anyway," Haines was saying to Barbara. She nodded and smiled, but still kept her eyes on the game till the chukker ended. "I should love it!" she said then with her usual frank emphasis. It was so soft that it hardly sounded like emphasis—only a girl's enjoyment. "I am simply spoiling for exercise; Aunt Fanny

doesn't realise it, but we never go out except in the motor. I haven't walked a yard since I arrived."

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked quickly. "I will get you a pony, or take you for walks. You need only tell me what you want—I am here to do it for you. You know," he added with a half-shamed laugh, "I am in your uncle's place for the nonce, and it is my duty to look after you!"

And Lady Stroud, watching them, said: "He will speak to-night if he gets a chance—or at latest to-morrow. It cannot be fenced off much longer."

But as a matter of fact he did not speak until the day before the Admiral's return, and then it was as much chance as deliberate intention. He had been waiting for it, of course, but he had meant to do the decent thing and ask the Admiral's leave before he said anything, as Barbara was so young and in the Strouds' care. Rodney Haines was a gentleman; he had no least intention of taking advantage or behaving badly. Only, unfortunately, he was also a man. There is no record that God created Adam gentle as well as man, and his sons are apt to revert to the original mould under stress of elementary emotion.

There were no guests dining at Government House that evening, as it chanced. Lady Stroud and Barbara had played bridge at the Club in the afternoon, and had come back to dinner alone. Rodney Haines had been hard worked all the afternoon, and could not even get down to fetch them; he looked tired and his eyes were unusually large and strained when he appeared at dinner. Lady Stroud noticed it, and said that they must all go to bed early, or

the Admiral would ask what on earth they had been doing when he returned to-morrow.

"You know we have been out every night since you came, or have had some one here, Barbara," she said with unnecessary remorse. "You have never been to bed before one, and you get up so early."

"Yes, I know, Aunt Fanny—I've enjoyed it so much!" said Barbara candidly.

"Well, Mr. Haines looks worn out!"

"I'm afraid that's me," said Barbara, ungrammatically sympathetic. "I dragged him out at six this morning and we walked quite a long way."

"It was the best thing you could do for me!" said the Colonial Secretary. "We none of us walk enough in Exile. I hope you mean to repeat the prescription every day." He did not mind feeling tired while those kind young eyes rested on him with self-reproach. He would have walked all round the coast of Exile, and across the tongue of desert, if he could feel her swinging along beside him all alone in the strange chill of the morning, with the great sombre Rocks stabbing the folded grey of the sky. He remembered the cold, sweet curve of her cheek as he fed his hungry eyes on her profile, and the maddening desire to take her hand in his and feel the warm presence of her as they walked so decorously side by side. . . . "You must not take my morning walk from me!" he pleaded.

But Barbara was rather concerned to see how hollow his eyes looked in the light of the new electric lamps, and she noticed anew that his face was almost too sharp-cut in its fine lines. Haines was

of a clean, wiry build, so spare that he never ranked with big men, though he was above middle height, and the soul in him seemed always burning out the body. People sometimes discovered his position with a little shock; he had the keenness but not the shut-door face of the mathematician, and might have belonged to the Church or to Science as well as to the Colonial Service. To Barbara he was the most interesting man she had ever met, because he was most interested in her. But his air of overstrain and nervous exhaustion to-night made him doubly attractive. If you want a girl of nineteen to admire you, draw a few lines in your face—she will never look at you without.

“I shall entertain you and Aunt Fanny to-night,” she said when they went out into the compound after dinner. “I am going to work the gramophone. You are both to sit quite still and do nothing; this is my show.”

But she was very considerate. She laid aside the “Nightcaps” record and “I’ll butt in!” and she selected public singers rendering “Ave Marias” and “Serenades” and brass bands playing Wagner (with the doors of the wooden case half closed). It was a little throaty perhaps, as gramophones often are, but very soothing; and it really did not matter because Lady Stroud dozed and Haines was not listening—he was watching the arc of light enclosing the radiant white figure and the glossy head as Barbara moved about the table.

At half-past ten Lady Stroud said: “Now Barbara, that’s enough—we really must go!” and carried off her niece with her, congratulating herself

that the danger was past for another day, and to-morrow the Admiral would be home. Haines and Barbara shook hands—a longer clasp than was strictly necessary, but then she was so sorry to see him look tired!—and all would have gone well if in her hurry the elder lady had not swept the younger away before she had retrieved the little silken bag in which she carried her handkerchief and a cigarette case that Haines had given her of silver filigree work. After she had been five minutes in her room Barbara discovered its loss, not yet having taken off her gown. There were no bells in Government House—it being a bungalow people called “Tala henna” and an Arab servant ran to answer. The partitions of the rooms, indeed, did not reach the ceilings, but allowed a draught of air to circulate straight through. If Barbara called, Aunt Fanny would be certain to hear, and would send her own *ayah* to see what was the matter, or come herself; and she was so tired, poor dear! Perhaps the servants had not yet put out the lamp, and she could run across to the compound and get the bag and return and no one be the wiser. Barbara opened her door softly, saw that the lights were not all out even in the drawing-room, and ran noiselessly between the pillars and through the door in the trellis-work out into the open air. . . .

The Colonial Secretary had not yet gone to bed. He had told the Arabs to leave a light in the drawing-room—which Barbara had seen—and was smoking a last cigarette under the flashing night sky. The lamp in the compound had been removed—only the faint radius of those in the drawing-room shone through the open jalousies of the bungalow and the trellis-

work that shut in the compound ; but the night was alight with stars, and Haines was lying back in one of the deep canvas chairs, his worn face uplifted to them. Barbara did not see him at first as she came stealing into the compound looking for her bag,—but his head turned quickly, and for a moment he hardly breathed as the light-footed filmy white shape drew nearer to him in its search. The outline of her figure looked almost nebulous in the uncertain light, and her face was bent down over the chairs until she reached the very one in which he sat. Then she started and gave a little cry, as one who meets with Fate advancing to meet her from what looked a friendly land.

“ Barbara ! ” he said out of the darkness, and had no need to raise his voice, she was so near. She stepped back as he rose, almost as if to run, for she was not ready for what she saw before her—indeed she was not ready, and she felt the desperate awe of a young votary before the very fire of the innermost shrine.

Haines was holding out his hands to her, trying to draw her nearer and stammering in his earnestness. She caught the words “ Love ” ; “ Wife ” ; “ For ever ”—symbols of mighty emotions untried by her—and laid her own trembling palms in those stretched to her as if impelled by his desire.

“ I don’t know—I think I do—it is too soon ! ” she gasped in answer to his appeal, and there was a cloud of tears in her blue eyes. Then the next thing she knew was that she was sitting in the canvas chair, and he was kneeling beside her with his head down on her knees, and she supposed she must have

refused him. His attitude was so dejected that it frightened her — she had not quite meant that perhaps, only it seemed too solemn an undertaking voiced in that “For ever.”

“Do you want me so much?” she said, and she laid her long slim hands half shrinkingly on the shorn brown head, afraid that this might be too much of a caress, but more afraid to leave it bowed so low.

He raised his face, and it frightened her. It was so seared and drawn. She had thought that love was a charming thing, akin to flowers and laughter and sunshine—at the best a little prosaic, with the humdrum joys of bread and butter and good comradeship. But this was a raging fire that she had lighted—a convulsion of Nature, an ocean depth unplumbed.

“Only if I can—make you love me,” he said thickly. The thrusting aside of a temptation to take her in the face of God or devil was like a physical wrench, and made him sway under the exertion of his own strength. His lips twisted a little as if with agony, but his eyes tried to smile, and that was worse to see. He would not have her on the devil’s terms—he would not. Only if God set His seal on the compact with love.

But she saw the tortured movement and flung her arms round his shoulders, her white breast above him like a bird’s. “I will do anything!” she said eagerly. “I only meant—you mustn’t think I *don’t*! I am only rather frightened.”

In moments of extreme stress Barbara told the exact truth. Always literal, she found less difficulty

than a more complicated nature in expressing exactly what she felt, and in this case it was piteously and ominously true. She was "only rather frightened." But he caught at the divine possibility of her former words and almost laughed, not knowing that his eyes were wet.

"May I take that to mean that you *do*?" he said; and then, "Barbara, darling, do kiss me!"

"That's a little thing, as I am going to be his wife!" thought the girl, and the amazement of the position she found herself in did away with the lesser embarrassment. She kissed him rather shyly with the cold soft lips of a child, and then added hurriedly, "For good-night!"

"But you will come for a walk early?" he pleaded, holding her as she rose. She leaned a little away from him, as if afraid of more endearments, but his very touch was reverent. She was the embodiment of a granted prayer, and prayer is holy.

"Yes," she said, and did not know that she would have said it with less reluctance if they had not just become engaged.

"Then good-night, dear heart, and sleep well!"

He kissed her again, very tenderly, but she did not this time return it; and then she crossed the bungalow to her own room, a different person from the girl who had gone out to find her silken bag.

"I left it there after all," thought Barbara, sitting down on her bed with her hands in her lap and not attempting to undress. A curious irritation for the triviality of the cause that had brought this crisis upon her possessed her mind and would not be

shaken off. Her last thought as she laid her head on the pillow that night was not of Rodney Haines.

“ I *will* have a pocket in my next gown, whatever the dressmaker says ! ” she said. “ It is nonsense, this always leaving things about, and having to go and look for them ! So many things happen.” . . .

CHAPTER VIII

“ He played—my beautiful soul with the earnest eyes,
My friend !—my soul, if the soul is the part that can rise
To the heights of God, as with wings—to the greatest
sublimities.

His long, firm hands on the music lingered, and strayed,
Longingly, lovingly—I—(did he know I was by ?)

I sat in the shade . . .

He played, my beautiful soul with the earnest eyes ! ”

THEO. MARZIALS.

LADY STROUD was aware that Barbara was taking morning walks with the Colonial Secretary before breakfast, but though she trembled she had not as yet raised an objection. Objections are apt to precipitate matters, and she was not so afraid of the influence of the morning as of the increasing heat of the day. If any one had told Lady Stroud that she regarded the tropics as a forcing-house for the emotions she would have been shocked into denying it ; but as a matter of fact she was apt of her charity to attribute many human backslidings to the brazen encouragement of the sun.

“ It’s the climate, dear,” was her invariable comment to the Admiral if he were betrayed into repeating a particularly racy gossip from the Club. “ Poor things ! What *can* you expect when the sun shines all day and every day ? It is so hard to repent under a cloudless sky ! England is so rainy—she obliges you to think of tears.”

On the day of the *Silverside's* return she came in to breakfast with a tranquil heart ; but a glance at Barbara and Rodney Haines destroyed her complaisance. Barbara was crumbling bread into guilty mounds all round her plate, and declined to look at anything but the table-cloth, and Haines was shameless with happiness and too uplifted to conceal it. Lady Stroud met his eyes across the table, and thought that they had never been so big and blue. They were rather sad eyes as a rule, despite their eager vitality, as if they were

“ Touched with the tragedy of Every Day.”

But there was no mistaking their expression to the mind of the Governor's wife. How they shone ! She would like to have boxed his ears, if it could have been done with dignity, while he sat opposite to her with that happy, handsome face, and spoiled the fish-cakes and curry for her.

“ Detestable man ! ” she thought to herself. “ Why couldn't he have waited till Jonathan was back ? I suppose he proposed to her in the middle of a dirty Arab street, or amongst the flabby vegetables in the market. He is rather a dear, too ! If I were his mother, I should want to hug him when he looks at her like that.”

Then she glanced at the girl's downcast face, and a premonition of dismay made her kindly heart sink. “ She can't have said ‘ No,’ or he wouldn't look like that,” she thought. “ But she is taking it very badly ! Is it a fit of shyness, or the discomfort of secrecy ? ”

At this point Barbara raised her eyes with perfect

composure. "We walked right out beyond Fort Bay, and looked at the dockyard, Aunt Fanny," she said. "I did so wish we had had Mr. Hervey with us; there are so many things I wanted to know. Do you think he would let us motor him out one day?"

"And we saw three Arabs going down to bathe on the way, and Miss Playfair was shocked," added Haines with dancing eyes. "She wanted to run away for fear they should undress. It never occurred to her until too late that they had nothing on already. It was like that delightful story of Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes'!"

"I was not at all shocked," said Barbara resentfully. "I was afraid there might be sharks. Mr. Haines had just told me it wasn't safe to bathe there."

"It isn't, for people as tempting as you!" said Haines audaciously. "The sharks don't like the taste of Arabs, they resemble black bread in flavour, and your Exile shark is a very dainty eater. He would fast all Lent for a chance of you at Easter, Miss Playfair!"

"I think you are very nasty!" said Barbara with a little shiver. "I forgot to take my camera, Aunt Fanny. Wasn't it stupid of me?"

"How did that happen?" asked Lady Stroud grimly. "You have never forgotten it before!" (She could quite account for it in her own mind.)

"Why, we left it on the table in the hall!" said Haines innocently, as if that were sufficient explanation; nor did Lady Stroud's glance at him abash him—he only laughed.

"I should have some more curry if I were you, Mr. Haines," she said unkindly. "You have a lot of work before you when the Admiral arrives. I expect you will be closeted together all day, and we shall see nothing of you!"

Was there or was there not a little relaxing of the muscles of Barbara's face at the suggestion, a little smile of possible relief in her eyes? "And he is going to tell me immediately after breakfast, before I have even digested mine!" thought Lady Stroud with an inward groan. "He will simply bubble over with happiness, and I shall not have the heart to cast one doubt upon the suitability of the thing."

She felt it all the harder because she would herself have said that it was so suitable—but for that one teasing detail of Barbara's manner. The man was sure of a governorship on his next promotion, good-looking, young for his age,—after all, why should he not be thirty-eight to her nineteen?—well off, and of good birth. Only—the curve of a girl's lips, the vague trouble of her eyes, the long white fingers crumbling bread round her plate! Lady Stroud tried to remember the details of her own engagement to the Admiral, but it was all lost in rosy light. "We were ridiculous—but we were so happy!" she said in reminiscence.

When Rodney Haines followed her across the drawing-room, as she knew he would, she felt rather despairingly that her hour was come, and without even a pretence of beginning her correspondence at the writing-table she sat down on the sofa and waited. He came straight to her side and stood

looking down on her with those shining eyes that had forewarned her across the breakfast table.

"Lady Stroud, I've done something very wrong—something you won't approve of!" he said.

"I'm sorry for that, Mr. Haines!" she retorted a little pointedly. "My husband being away, it——"

"Yes, I know," he said penitently. "Of course, I didn't mean to do anything to vex you when I'm here in charge; but last night——"

"Last night!" said Lady Stroud in spite of herself. "I thought it was this morning!"

He gave a little boyish laugh and sat down beside her. "You know all about it, don't you?" he said coaxingly. "And I want you to forgive me before I throw myself on the Admiral's mercy. If I have you on my side it won't look so bad for me, will it?"

"You know perfectly well that you are irresistible when you coax like that," said Lady Stroud calmly, "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself throughout!" She held out her hand to him with a friendly, motherly gesture, and he bent his head over it quickly.

"You won't be afraid to give her to me?" he said impetuously. She tried to say something about Mrs. Playfair, but he cut her short. "Barbara says her mother will say whatever you and the Admiral say! Oh, I know it's a very short acquaintance,—but it makes no difference, I should think the same a hundred years hence."

The pathetic, crippled look was almost gone from his face; but somehow she knew it was there—

must be there always somehow, shadowing him, and she dreaded to bring it back. She liked the triumphant manhood of him so much it was all so satisfactory—save for that teasing detail of Barbara's face at breakfast.

"Barbara is very young!" she faltered.

"But you won't let that stand against me!" he said anxiously.

"My dear — Mr. Haines" (she had almost said "boy" to the Colonial Secretary, who was eight-and-thirty!), "there is nothing against you. Most chaperons would welcome you with open arms, and I have no doubt that Barbara's mother can be talked over; but I have to think of the child too, you know. It is so dreadful when a girl does not—does not know her own mind!" she hazarded.

The next instant she wished she had risked anything rather than dim the eager brightness of his face. "She is so young!" she repeated lamely.

"Perhaps I ought not to have spoken yet—but I couldn't help it. Are you vexed with me?"

"No; but I somehow wish you could have waited."

"I've been waiting all my life—for this." He looked up with deep pathetic eyes that made her shiver. "It is so wonderful!" he said. But she wished, all the more, that he had fallen in love with a woman rather than a girl. In ten years' time Barbara might have understood that look and met it with an equal tenderness.

"Don't be in a hurry," she found herself saying almost urgently. "Give her time; she is so—so inexperienced."

"Yes, I know," he assented readily, but he did not know. "Oh, I will be good to her—I will be very good."

"Yes, I know you will—only don't be too good. Don't wrap her up in cotton-wool to shelter her from every wind. Remember, she did not want to be shut off on the roof in the Arab fashion!"

She dreaded a confidence from the girl even more than from the man; but Barbara spared her that embarrassment. When she reappeared at luncheon time she looked just as cool and matter-of-fact as usual, and she stooped her tall head for her aunt's kiss of silent congratulation with unexpected composure.

"I suppose that Mr. Haines has told you, Aunt Fanny," she said. "I hope you do not mind our stealing a march on you. I think he meant to have asked Uncle Jonathan's leave first."

"These things come on one rather suddenly, don't they, Babs?" said Lady Stroud kindly. "I daresay your uncle can be persuaded to forgive you—so long as you are happy!"

"Of course I am happy!" said Barbara with a little laugh, opening her large eyes. She seemed to have got over her gravity of the morning, and was quite ready to respond to Haines' teasing and mischief throughout the midday meal. After lunch they sat about and talked in the cool of the hall waiting for the signal to announce the *Silverside's* arrival, and nothing could have been more natural and unembarrassed than their manner to each other and to her; yet Lady Stroud had never felt more relieved to see the Admiral's fresh-coloured face

and curly grey head than she did when he appeared at last, and she had a sense of shifting a great responsibility when she got him alone and broke the news to him first.

"Well," said the Admiral dryly, "it seems to me you've been pretty busy for a week. Here's Bunney just telephoned up that there's trouble down at the dockyard, and Murgatroyd met me on the pier with a longer face than usual and the information that poor Lestoc has died in hospital, and now you tell me that my Colonial Secretary is engaged to my niece!"

"Jonathan, you won't be hard on him, will you?" said Lady Stroud anxiously. It was noticeable that she did not say "them." "The poor dear is so happy; I don't think," added Lady Stroud, with a wrinkle in her kind forehead, "that any one *ought* to be quite so happy as that. It seems somehow like forestalling Providence. What is the use of Heaven if there's nothing fresh to look forward to?"

The Admiral roared. "One might as well try the other place, eh? Hope he won't get sent down for a change while still on earth. Reaction is the devil's balance weight. I say, Fanny, he's not going to gush about Barbara, is he?" The Admiral looked really alarmed.

"Don't be an owl!" said Lady Stroud. "He's thirty-eight, and a C.M.G. It is only that he looks so dreadfully radiant." And she sighed. "What is this dreadful news about poor Mr. Lestoc?"

"Too true, I'm afraid. That Arab prison finished him before the doctors could get him out. Of

course, I can't say so to any one but you, Fan, but my Chief Justice ought to be tried for manslaughter."

"I do so dislike Mr. Everard—I always have ever since we came. I am thankful that his worst convictions took place while we were home on leave. Poor Madame Lestoc! and all those children. Oh, Jonathan, it is disgraceful that any man can have the power to abuse power as Edgar Everard has done! Surely we ought to do something!"

"Oh, come now!" said the Admiral easily. "I do think he is morally guilty of poor Lestoc's death, for he knew the man could never stand the sentence. But Everard is well within his rights, as far as we know. He came and talked it over very sensibly with me from the first—said he knew he was damned unpopular, but what could he do? Yale had let things go a good deal, and showed too much leniency to the traders, and there was a good deal of discontent in consequence amongst the Jews. Everard admitted he'd been a bit drastic, but there was such open contempt of court ——"

"Yes, I know—he talked you straight over to his way of thinking!" said Lady Stroud shrewdly. "He could talk Exile into the belief that it was a rose-garden. But he won't talk public Opinion over now that Lestoc has died. Jonathan, I heard a rumour that there's a Petition against him praying for an inquiry, which has gone home."

"Well, if there is, my dear, the Colonial Office must see to it. I am not responsible, thank the Lord! We had better not know anything about the Petition, officially."

"I wonder if Mr. Everard knows! I imagine not. He is at Health still on sick leave, but there is another case to come up next month—that murder out at Banishment. He must come back then."

"Ah, that's a case for a jury, or, as we call it in Exile, assessors; he can't do as he likes there."

"Yes, he can, if he can persuade the assessors that it was not premeditation. Colonel Damer was explaining it all to me the other night. And they say that Everard is on the side of the prisoner because the wretched man's sister is one of those women—you know."

"I say, Fanny, you *have* been listening to scandal! Is Everard really at Health—since you know so much?"

"Yes, really at Health this time, though I don't believe he is ill—he is never ill! His wife is still here; but I think she is going to join him for a change."

"What sort of change? For her or for him?"

"Who is talking scandal now? I meant for her. Not that she looks to want it any more than he; Mrs. Everard always looks the same. She was dining at the Club the other night with the Vanburens, perfectly beautiful and perfectly indifferent. I sometimes wonder whether any woman knows anything at all about her own husband!"

"Good Lord!" said the Admiral, and put his helm down hard a-port to avoid a dangerous course. "Hervey said Haines was booked to dine with him to-night," he remarked, reversing the engines of the conversation. "I suppose he won't go now, eh?"

"I think he will. He has been with Barbara all day, so he really has no excuse to refuse. And men always keep their engagements with Mr. Hervey."

She was quite correct in her forecast, and the Colonial Secretary motored out to the bungalow in the desert that night, to arrive five minutes before his host. Hervey had been in unofficial consultation with the dockyard engineers over the discovery of a fresh water spring in the bottom of one of the docks, and had afterwards gone out to Reserve to look into arrears of business. He apologised for keeping his guest waiting while he dressed, but turned him over to the piano; and five minutes later, while he changed into conventional evening clothes, he heard the echoing house full of melody, and smiled to himself over the folding of his cummerbund.

"There's Tschaikowsky's 'Visions'! I knew that long-limbed girl was going to put the right stuff into his music," he said. "Now I shall have to listen while he tells me that she has blue eyes and a pink skin—as if I hadn't ordinary eyesight! I'll forgive him if he plays like that afterwards, though."

His strong mouth relaxed, and he stood for a moment listening. Haines was running his hands over the keys as if he loved them—he played the piano less perfectly, but no less sympathetically, than the violin—and drawing the sweetness out of the deep changing melody. He was still playing when Hervey came downstairs and the gong interrupted.

"Come and eat iced melon—there's a boat in from Aden," said the engineer, dropping his heavy hand on the younger man's slighter shoulder. There were only two years between them, but at the moment they might almost have been father and son. "My dear fellow, you've got it badly, haven't you?"

Haines laughed—he could afford to. "First time out, you see," he said. "You try it!"

"No, thanks!" Hervey shrugged his broad shoulders. "I am still too much interested in my own future. There is no doubt but that love is a handicap. The minute you care for anything or anybody you slip the handcuffs on your own wrists. It is only those who care for nothing but themselves who are free agents."

He sat down opposite his guest and took up a letter lying by his own plate. "When did this come?" he asked the butler in a different tone. The good-humoured cynicism was gone. His lips closed again more firmly, and his level eyes held nothing but their own secrets.

"To-day, sahib!" was the oracular answer.

It was from Mrs. Everard. Hervey played with it in his fingers for a minute without opening it, with a curious excitement in his blood. He expected a deliberately worded denunciation of himself and his insolent proposal, and rather gloated over it beforehand. He was feeling very virile, very full of vitality, from the cruise, and he longed to use his strength and to fight somebody or something. A physical quarrel being impossible, this woman should prove a mental foeman worthy of his steel.

He could imagine the outspoken condemnation of her words before he read them, for she would not mince matters—she would thrust true and straight. He longed to hurt somebody in his turn, though he had not settled his plan of campaign as yet.

“Don’t mind me, old chap—read your chit!” said Haines easily. Love had not impaired his appetite. He was enjoying the iced melon as a lesser nature could not enjoy, for it is only fair that immense capacity for suffering should be counter-balanced by a frenzy of enjoyment, even in trivial things.

“I have just got some white wine over from France. It travels deuced badly, but try it. Othman, give Mr. Haines some sauterne!”—Hervey broke the envelope of the letter as the golden wine rippled into the glasses, and read it at a glance.

“DEAR MR. HERVEY,

“I am driving out as far as Half-Way House to-morrow, to meet my husband, whom I am expecting to arrive either that night or next morning. I am putting up at Half-Way House, and should be grateful to you if you would see that the place is not quite uninhabitable. Lady Stroud told me that last time they were out it was falling into disrepair. I shall of course bring my own servant, who will buy food in the village.”

“With apologies for troubling you,

“Yours sincerely,

“CLAUDIA EVERARD.”

Hervey folded the letter, slipped it into the envelope, and put it in his pocket. It was still anybody’s game; she had not accepted his conditions—he had known that she would not do so—but she was temporising. Perhaps she was obeying the

letter of his plan to make a last appeal to him ; or perhaps she wished to speak her contempt rather than write it. He hoped it would be the latter. It gave him more scope. Anyhow, he was glad that the battle should be prolonged, that she had not been strong enough to say the "No" she meant. The blood leapt in his veins again with the longing to fight. He looked across the table at Haines with a smile, and there was exultation of a sort in his own face.

"Well," he said, "and when are you to be married?"

"Oh, within six months, I hope!" said the Colonial Secretary. "The Admiral was awfully good; so was Lady Stroud. They will help to tackle Barbara's people. I hate long engagements!"

"I thought this was the first time out?" said Hervey, and both men laughed. "How many long engagements have you weathered?"

"None, thank God!" He drew a quick breath, and his face flushed a little. "When you have reached my age you feel you want as much as you can have to offer a girl. I'm glad the slate is a clean one—fairly clean," he added in a lower tone, twisting the stem of his wineglass in his fingers. No man would have had the humility or honesty to add that rider who was not in love. Before he meets with the refiner's fire it seems to him that a sponge dipped in the waters of oblivion will make any slate clean enough. To Hervey the scruple was absurd.

"What will you do? Settle down at home?" he asked. "For Heaven's sake, Haines, don't raise Herefords or collect teaspoons! Marriage is too

often the front door to a hobby, and a man with a hobby is worse than a man with a grievance."

"No, I shan't leave the Service—now," said Haines simply. "I did mean to; there seemed nothing much in it except undoing what the last man did and cutting down the expenditure. Heavens! we have never done trying to reduce the Imperial Deficit Loan in the Colonies! Some Governors save on the salaries of their officials, and some on the agricultural grants, but to be a success in the Service you must be a financier. I hate cheese-paring. I thought this would be about my last job."

Hervey's face darkened from its suppressed excitement. "Yes, Exile sees the last of a good many of us," he said. "My job's done too. I'm only fooling about, cooling my heels."

"We can't imagine Exile without you, Hervey. It's almost traditional." The younger man looked up, almost startled out of his own self-interest.

"Yes, and tradition is the most deadly of hindrances. I ought to have got out of it five years ago—either to look for a new job or to retire to the other side of the world with a fresh environment." He was restlessly conscious as he spoke of the truth of his own words. As long as the work was there to do he had done it, and had not had time for the baser amusements that had ended in tempting silly women beyond their strength, or outwitting weaker men. He had begun it in reaction after the strenuousness of his work in Exile, and had said it was good to take a holiday and play awhile. But where had it led him? To such vapid affairs as Mrs. Bride's, or the trapping of vermin like Everard!

He, who knew himself a giant, had sat down to play at spillikins with dwarfs.

"When you've got some one to fight for it seems worth while," said Haines thoughtfully. "I want to get up top now, just for Barbara—I want to give her something worth having,—I want to give her everything!" he said, and then laughed at himself shamefacedly.

"I said you were in for it!" said Hervey good-naturedly. And then a thought struck him and roused a new interest. He had always imagined that Mrs. Everard had had a deeper liking for Rodney Haines than for other men—one could hardly say more with such a self-concealed nature—and perhaps it was the shock of Haines' engagement that had driven her into temporising with an insult. Perhaps she cared so little for herself now that she would even go so far as to seem compliant, turning the occasion finally to a chance to plead in her husband's interest. He had forgotten Rodney Haines and his probable influence in her life. It might be that that had outweighed the impulse to strike him, figuratively at least, across the mouth; but he never doubted the impulse.

"Is she suffering?" he wondered with a curious cruelty of interest. "It will be worth while seeing how it affects her. There should be something that will betray her, however great her control."

Rodney Haines had brought the violin by request. Hervey would almost have sent him home again had he come without his fiddle, and he knew it and appreciated the appreciation. There was no one to share the musical evening, but the two men

played on for each other for an hour or so after dinner, Hervey at the piano and Haines with his own instrument. Haines usually preferred French music, and interpreted it as he did no other nation's—Berlioz (he played the “Dance of the Sylphs” so that his hearers only vaguely regretted an orchestra), Chopin, Saint Saëns, Ropartz, and, before all, Gounod, whom he taught men not to despise. Gounod is only to be properly heard through the human voice or a violin. When it comes to orchestral effects he may be a composer, but he is no longer a genius. Haines took his melodies and made them living things. But to-night he chose Tschaikowsky rather than the Frenchman, and played the “Visions” all over again for Hervey's benefit, until the older man could have wept for his lost youth and the spirit of romance that lies just beyond the horizon of all lives. Haines had never played so before, but he could never again lose what he had gained because a soul had been born into his music.

“This,” said Hervey when he was leaving, “has been a great night.” And then his thought ran on, and he wondered what different sort of evening he should spend to-morrow. Discord for the harmony, enmity of a woman instead of friendship with a man. “Give me my own sex for company!” he said out of the knowledge behind him.

Haines looked round the great echoing rooms affectionately. They were excellent for sound, being bereft of carpets and draperies. And because Hervey had a garden there was not that lack of flowers that made the Fort barren.

"I say, Hervey," said the Colonial Secretary, with a half apologetic smile, "there's a thing you could do for me—if you don't mind. Can you spare some jessamine? I think Barbara would like some."

The jessamine that grows in Exile—or rather in the desert, for nothing will grow on the Rocks—is a larger variety than the one at home. The flowers are thick clustered, strong-scented, and tropically luxuriant, for there are wells at Golgotha, and, though they are brackish, certain things will grow. Hervey rang a bell and told his butler to get Mr. Haines a big bunch of flowers and put it in the car that was waiting for him—"Anything you can cut," he said laconically.

"Thanks awfully!" said Haines, with an earnestness of gratitude that made his host smile a little dryly. "There are so few things one can give a girl, out here! Somehow one does miss being able to take her a few flowers or sweets!"

"Send home to Charbonnel's. She needn't wait till you get to England to make herself sick. I suppose you would be ordering a florist's shop every day at home, but we'll do our best for you."

He had never thought of giving Mrs. Bride or any other passing love so ephemeral a thing as the flowers from his garden. He had generally placed his cars at their disposal for the time being, and had made substantial purchases of silks or feathers in the Arab shops. In one case he had written a cheque for some bridge debts. Women preferred solid benefits, in his experience; but the cases

were widely different. He wondered if he should ever be such a fool as to cut goldmore blossoms and jessamine and Japanese lilies for a woman, and what she would say if he did! It was improbable, anyway. He was not a sentimental person.

But Rodney Haines drove home across the desert with a great bunch of sweetness making the night odorous, and when he presented himself at Government House the next afternoon (he resisted going in the morning) he brought Barbara the scarce flowers that only Hervey could grow in any profusion. She thanked him very sweetly, but, the rest of the house party being present, there could be no demonstration.

"That's a good-sized posy for Exile!" said the Admiral, looking with kindly criticism at the tall white girl standing by the teatray with her hands full of flowers. "Rather suggestive of a bride, eh, Babs?"

The girl flushed quickly, and made a movement almost as if she would put her flowers down. One of the goldmore blossoms broke and fell, not, appropriately, at Haines' feet, but, as it chanced, at Merryn's. The Flag-Lieutenant was waiting as usual for a chance of usefulness, and was ready to hand cups in silence. He was not a talkative young man.

"You have presented Mr. Merryn with a button-hole!" said Lady Stroud kindly, coming to the rescue of Barbara's hot cheeks. The girl looked almost distressed—Jonathan ought not to tease young people! "Put it in your coat, and go and

call on all the smart ladies of the garrison, Mr. Merryn! What are you doing this afternoon?"

"I was going to play polo, Lady Stroud."

"There won't be much goldmore blossom left when you've finished!" said the Admiral with a chuckle. "Bride tells me that there was a scrum one week, and the R.A.M.C. had to bind up broken brows!"

"Perhaps that accounts for Mr. Yarrow's!" said Lady Stroud with obvious relief. She was so charitable that even a small doubt was abhorrent to her. "I was really quite afraid he had been fighting. I believe I told Dr. Bride so."

"Then that accounts for Bride's information to me!" said the Admiral, the chuckle growing into a great laugh. "He calculated on it reaching you and affording a kind delusion. He's a good little fellow is Bride."

"Yarrow's scar is now becoming an asset," said Haines, with his eyes dancing. "He was at the Club dance a night or so ago, and he was trying to impress on Mrs. Vanburen that it was a birthmark and much cherished in his family. I thought that showed ingenuity."

"Yes," chimed in Mr. Smyth, the secretary: "he said that an ancestor gained it in the Crusades from a blow by a mailed fist, and it has reappeared at every third generation since! The Vanburens being Americans, he hoped to impress them."

There was a laugh, which did not somehow include Barbara or Merryn. The Flag-Lieutenant had not picked up the goldmore blossom which still lay at his feet; he fidgeted restlessly, and his good-

looking face was unusually embarrassed. As a rule there was nothing to read in Mr. Merryn's smooth burnt face but a healthy love of the open air. His eyes were blue, but not in the least like the blue of Barbara's or of Rodney Haines'. There are as many variations of colour as of harmonies. He was clean-shaven, being a gunnery man, and his lips were rather full and firm. If his face ever became animated it was usually at a mention of sport ; but on the present occasion he was displaying an animated discomfort, had any one chanced to notice it. He glanced at Barbara, but she was looking down at her flowers, and there was nothing in the soft seriousness of her face to deny or encourage. At last he stooped suddenly, under cover of the laugh at Mr. Yarrow's expense, and picked up the gold-more blossom, in his hand. He was still carrying it when he made his excuses and went out to find his waiting pony in the compound, but it was not in his coat as he rode down the sandy slopes to polo.

It is possible that Mr. Merryn's thoughts ran on the untowardness of Fate that sent one girl into a colony teeming with young men and then bestowed her on an official of eight and thirty, who might be supposed to be happy enough in a respected record and good prospects. There was really nothing left for the young men to do except devote themselves to the married ladies of the Fort, and this was productive of scandal at the Club. Mr. Merryn may have felt inclined to reproach Fate with the just plea that one girl was not enough to go round. But it is much more probable that he told himself that Exile was a beast of a hole because there was nothing to

shoot and still less to hunt, and the soldier men had all the luck. There is no naval station at Somaliland, for instance, and even if you do go to China it is getting harder and harder to obtain sufficient leave for a good shoot. Anyhow, he did the best he could with the resources at his command and played polo; and being No. 2 made a notably fine shot on the near side that sent the ball slick through the other fellows' goal. It ought to have contented him, but so cross-grained is human nature that I am afraid he wondered if Haines had motored out to Fort Bay with his *fiancée*, and wished he could see the great breakers rolling in from Banishment—just as Barbara, looking out over the blue waters, wished that she were playing polo!

CHAPTER IX

“ Not with my soul, Love !—bid no soul like mine
Lap thee around nor leave the poor sense room !
Soul—travel-worn, toil-weary—would confine
Along with soul, soul’s gains from glow and gloom,
Captures from soarings high and divings deep.
Spoil-laden soul, how should such memories sleep ?
Take sense, too—let me love entire and whole—
Not with my soul ! ”

ROBERT BROWNING.

At the Club next day they were discussing the Petition which must by now have reached England, and the chances of the Colonial Office giving a satisfactory reply. Though the Petition had been signed by no one officially connected with Exile it had been privately known and approved by most of the men present, who had backed the foreign consuls and the European traders with sympathetic support. In the strong feeling that existed against Everard they would have helped the scheme financially had it gone to the High Court, and in the dearth of interests in Exile it formed an engrossing topic of conversation and speculation. The cables, printed on flimsy paper and posted in the reading-room of the Club, announced the arrival of the mail by which the Petition had gone home with a broken propeller, and a little knot of men were clustered round them, reading over each other’s shoulders.

"Glad she didn't go to the bottom, or it would have all been to do over again," said Yarrow, with a fine disregard for the fate of the passengers and crew as compared with the mails. "As it is she's three days late."

"It would have been done again, anyhow," said Dr. Bride doggedly. "If I had to give up leave and walk round Exile to beat up signatures, I'd have got that thing through."

"Poor Lestoc!"

"Poor Everard—before Exile has done with him!" said Yarrow grimly. "I wonder what the sentence would be for telling him once what we thought of him, before it's all over!"

"Eighteen months," said Vanburen, the American consul, cynically. "No one is going to get two years and a chance of appeal in Everard's hands! Is he still located at Health, by the way? Here, Hervey,—come and look at the cables." The Government engineer had just entered the writing-room and strolled over to join the group. "Have you heard if Everard has returned from Health?" said Vanburen in a lower tone.

"I think not; but there is some talk of his coming," said Hervey, reading over the other men's shoulders from his greater height. He smiled a little, as if in some amused reminiscence. "The Chief Justice finds that the air of Health suits him better than even Banishment at present." What he was really thinking of was that ambiguous clause in Mrs. Everard's letter—"I am expecting my husband, either to-morrow or next day"—and he wondered whether there might be a grain of truth

in it, though the idea had been prompted by himself.

"There's this case of the Haroun Ali crime coming on in a few weeks," said Smyth, the Admiral's secretary, looking at the older man for an opinion. "Will he dare to get the murderer off, do you think?"

"There is very little he has not dared at present!" said Hervey, with a faint wonder that was almost admiration in his tone. "Why should he not get the man off? A little mercy would be a change, and sound well when he comes to explain himself."

"There won't be much explanation of Lestoc. Did you see him before he died, Doctor?"

"Yes, poor fellow!" said Bride, his face falling from its usual cheerfulness. "He asked me to get up a subscription for his wife and children. The business is ruined, you know."

Several hands went instinctively into several pockets, and the men's faces would not have made a pleasant group of jurors had Everard himself been on his trial.

"And he used to be one of the few decent business men here," burst out Yarrow. "Oh, it's damnable!"

"Put me down for a pony, Bride," said the Colonial Treasurer, who was standing by. "The British ought to bear the brunt of their own cursed system. That one of *our* judges should have given such a rotten show—that's the thing I can't swallow."

"Switzerland ought to go to war about it," said Yarrow hotly. "He was her consul—we would if they'd treated our man like that."

"Oh, shut up, Yarrow—you're always going to war about something. Didn't you have enough of it with the Germans? Hervey, what's your opinion? Will the Colonial Office take the matter up on our Petition?"

"They are bound to," said Hervey quietly. "There may be some jibbing, but it's only a matter of time."

It was his firm conviction, and had been all along, when the Petition was first mooted. A Petition as representative as the one that had gone home, backed by certain evidence that had accumulated since Everard's first sweeping sentences, was not a thing that even the British Government could put aside. The charges were grave and demanded an inquiry. He marvelled that Everard, astute as he had shown himself, had not foreseen this; but the man seemed to have lost his head a little latterly and become drunk with power. Secure in the legal knowledge that no action could lie against him, he could discountenance an inquiry, which after all must take some time, even if he had heard of the Petition, which it was probable that he had not, as it was carefully engineered and restricted to influential names. The one thing that had shaken his nerve and filled him with craven terror was the consequence of Hervey publishing the contents of his own unguarded letter. That frank confession of rascality, once known in the bazaars, might have endangered his personal safety, and Everard, who had no moral fear, was the most utter physical coward. He knew himself unpopular with the Arab population, partly from his favouritism of

the Jews and partly from having interfered with their women. His house at Banishment was becoming notorious not only for the unmarried girls he had bought—for the lower class Arab in Exile thinks but little of his daughter's virtue—but for unfaithful wives who were suspected of having been there. No charge so serious to an Arab had ever been proved, or even his position as a Government official might not have saved Edgar Everard ; but he alone knew how narrow the escape had been, and, once give the people the incentive of knowing that the Chief Justice had not the moral support of the English, there was more than a probability that they would take the law into their own hands. Hervey knew this, because he knew Exile and its population as no Governor had ever known it in his brief tenure of office ; but Everard knew it too, with his coward's instinct, and it had paralysed him. His blunder about Hervey and the firm of Moses, Kalif & Co. had been partly the result of Arab treachery, for he had been intentionally misinformed through his women.

Hervey did not play bridge that afternoon, he waited until the Admiral put in an appearance to have a chat with him about the trouble at the dockyard from the fresh-water spring ; for the Admiral liked to be consulted though he was extremely impracticable in his views, and drove the engineering staff nearly wild with a desire to rival Malta, regardless of geographical inequalities. Hervey did not mind, and while the Admiral was lured into stating his opinions and having them tenderly exposed in their foolishness, he did not

know that he was being humoured like a child. He went off to play auction at six o'clock, with the firm conviction that he had converted Hervey to improvements which the engineer had just put into his head, leaving Hervey to make his way leisurely out of the Club and to his own car. He met Rodney Haines and his *fiancée* coming in, Barbara with some of his own flowers in the breast of her white gown.

"Come back and have a chat," said Haines cordially. "Barbara and I have tramped out to Fort Bay and back, and came on to look after Lady Stroud."

"She hasn't arrived yet. Where's Merryn?"

"Playing polo," said Barbara without waiting for Haines to answer. "Do come back, Mr. Hervey!"

"I can't, thanks, Miss Playfair. I have an engagement."

For one fantastic moment he wondered what she would say if she knew the purport of that engagement, and that Mrs. Everard was coming out to the bungalow in the desert. But her large, clear eyes were so empty of all meaning in life save visible things that he was spared a sense of shame, even in the speculation. She simply would not understand, or if she understood she would not credit it.

He turned away and got into his car—in the driver's seat as usual. But he did not drive as fast as usual to-night, and his hard face was harder than ever against the flaming sunset behind Banishment islet. Perhaps even he was slow to meet the cruelty that he had designed, though his bitter purpose never faltered. When he reached his

own gates he drew up at Hassan's house instead of turning in and got out of the car.

"You can take her round to the garage," he said to the Arab chauffeur. "I am going in here for a minute."

His inspection of the house and interviewing of the caretakers did not take him long. It was nothing but a farce—he knew that without pre-arrangement it would be almost impossible for any lady to sleep there. Then he walked over to his own bungalow.

"Mrs. Everard has written me that she is coming out on her way to meet the Chief Justice," he told his butler. "She meant to put up at Hassan's, but it is quite impossible. I have been over there, and the house is unprepared. They must come here of course. She does not know if Mr. Everard will arrive to-night or to-morrow, but you had better prepare the big room for them—the one next to mine."

"Yes, sahib."

The order had been given in Arabic, and Othman withdrew to see that the great chamber was ready. The appearance of two guests at a moment's notice was no unusual thing at Hervey's bungalow, and did not inconvenience the cook. Hervey did not even trouble to give extra orders about dinner or to superintend the table. Othman knew his work. There would be plenty of flowers, in spite of the generous bunch that had been cut for Mr. Haines last night.

The master of the house heard the roll of Mrs. Everard's car as he was looking over the afternoon's chits, brought out by special messenger. It stopped

in the road outside, at Half-way House ; but he had left a message there, and he knew what would follow. Each move of the game they were playing had been carefully prepared, and he wondered whether she would show any perturbation, whether she would follow his lead ill or well. When she appeared a few minutes later in her long motor coat, however, the veil to save her from dust and desert sand was still wound over her head and face, and served as an effective screen.

"I understand that you are kind enough to invite me to dinner," she said with perfect composure as they shook hands. Her voice, coming from under those soft grey folds, told him nothing save that she was a little weary. "It is very good of you."

"More than that, I am afraid that you must let me put you up," he said courteously. "I went over to Hassan's, but they were totally unprepared, and it would be quite impossible for you to stay there."

"I am afraid I gave you very short notice," she agreed quietly.

"My servant will show you your room and take your luggage up," he said. "If there is anything you want, will you tell him?"

"I think—I should like a bath!" said Mrs. Everard, with such extreme nonchalance that for a moment he was nonplussed. Had this woman no nerves to shake her magnificent control? "The journey across the desert is a little trying. I feel as if the sand had penetrated my clothes."

"Certainly!" said Hervey, recovering himself.

"I am so used to it I hardly notice it now, but to a lady it must be a trial. Have you a servant with you?"

"My *ayah*. I suppose she can sleep in the servants' quarters?"

"Of course. Take al Siyyidha to her room, Othman, and see that the *ayah* prepares a bath."

Mrs. Everard turned to follow the Arab up the single flight of stairs to the rooms above, but as she did so Hervey deliberately crossed the room to her side.

"Do you expect the Chief Justice to-night, or—to-morrow?" he said.

Mrs. Everard paused in her turn. "I am afraid he will not arrive in time for dinner," she said. "If he is not here by ten o'clock I am not to expect him until to-morrow."

"Very well."

He moved aside to let her pass, which she did without another glance in his direction. Hervey stood at the foot of the stairs a moment, watching her as she ascended with an inscrutable face. She was a very graceful woman, and her grey draperies clung round her like some grey cloud. He saw the last fold of them disappear on to the floor above, and then he laughed a little, shortly, and there was a racing element of excitement in it.

When the gong went at half-past eight he was already in the dining-room awaiting his guest. The rooms led out of each other in the fashion of Exile houses, so that there was small reason for remaining in the outer room before dinner. Hervey looked impressive in evening dress; his shoulders were so

very broad under the white dinner jacket, and his height made it impossible for the rooms to dwarf him despite their vastness. On the square grey head the thick hair look like burnished silver, and his face kept its own secrets. There was nothing to say of him but that he was a strong man,—the strength might be qualified with cruelty, or hardness, or strict justice, but the bed-rock of his nature was strength.

The gong had hardly ceased reverberating before Mrs. Everard's footfall sounded on the uncarpeted stair, and then she was coming across the library, and a moment later she appeared. Hervey had never seen her so perfectly beautiful or so composed. Sometimes in looking at her face he had been surprised by a suspicion of pain in the wide brows or curved red mouth, but to-night there was nothing but a great tranquillity as if she were supremely at her ease. He had wondered idly if she would wear the same dark dress as at their last interview, but her dinner gown was white with long transparent sleeves to the wrist, and only open sufficiently to show the curve of her throat and neck. He liked the way she had wound her dull gold hair round her head, leaving a clean outline, and the absence of any ornament or jewellery about her. Her skin was really flawless, and how crimson her mouth looked by contrast ! That curve of her short upper lip was her greatest charm, perhaps, if one excepted the curious eyes with their winy colour beneath the smudged lashes.

“ What satisfactory rooms you have here ! ” said Mrs. Everard as she took the seat opposite her host.

"I had forgotten the house ; I have been here so little."

"You do not favour me very often," said Hervey, his level eyes resting on her across the clusters of flowers which filled the centre of the table in honour of al Siyyidha. He found her a goodly picture—no more. Indeed, her composure angered him as always.

"I do not remember that you have asked me," said Mrs. Everard quietly, with a truthfulness that was more effective than excuse.

"You were not at the Club to-day," he said, to change the subject. He could not very well admit that he never asked a woman whom he found dull. Mrs. Everard was not dull at the present moment, to his mind, but she was still baffling.

"No," she said. "I was just going down when Mrs. Vanburen called on me with a subscription list. Do you know Mrs. Vanburen ?"

"In connection with a subscription list I do," he said. "She is so charitable that she overreaches herself."

"I imagine that they have not much means, and her natural generosity takes the form of a subscription list."

"Oh, I grant you her virtues. But she is so anxious to have money to give away that she would almost collect it from the people to whom she wishes to give it. What was her object this time ?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I do not think I listened. I only know that I subscribed seventy-five rupees !"

They both laughed a little, but the situation

struck Hervey with a sense of unreality, like a scene in a play. The flower-laden table, better appointed than any in Fort Exile, except Government House, his bare-footed servants moving to and fro with the tempting dishes (it was an excellent dinner), the beautiful woman facing him with her soft, unruffled face, made a charming sensuous picture in which tragedy and insult and revenge had no place. And yet he felt that he and Claudia Everard were far more a part of the tragedy than of these outward semblances. And he wondered how soon the tragedy would begin—at what point in the game the courtesies would stop, and she would rise, outraged, to denounce him. It was impossible before the servants. Perhaps she would wait till they were gone. In his character of host he fulfilled his part perfectly in the meanwhile.

“I hope you will drink some wine,” he said. “I notice that very few ladies take wine in Exile, but after your drive out I am sure you are tired.”

“It is too hot to drink wine in Exile as a general rule,” she answered. “But I think I should be glad of some to-night.”

“Champagne?”

“I should prefer it.”

He had ordered it beforehand, and had it put on the ice that came out from the ice factory at Reserve. The golden wine frothed in the cut glasses like blood in the veins of a god, and she sipped it as if she enjoyed it, without affectation or any demur. Suddenly she leant across the table towards him, the glass in her hand.

“Will you please wish me happiness?” she said.

If the Sphinx had awakened from its long silence and propounded another riddle he could not have been more mystified. But there was no betrayal in his face as he bowed to her, and stretching out his hand clashed his glass lightly against hers.

"I hope you have not kept the whole of your good fortune to yourself," he said. "Surely you will wish it back to me!"

"Everything you most desire," she said with the same serenity. "I never knew a better phrase than that old Biblical beatitude, 'Grant thee thy heart's desire, and fulfil all thy wishes!'"

"The difficulty with most people is to know their heart's desire," he said with a slight shrug. "So many of us drop the first treasure clutching at the second."

"And lose both?" she said. "I am a very single-minded person. I have never hesitated over my heart's desire."

Was she thinking of that letter, fast locked in his safe upstairs? Did she think there were more ways than one of obtaining it? He wondered how such a woman would hold a revolver, and whether those white hands would falter with death in their grip! He thought not. There was a certain cold suspicion in his face turned towards her now. He began to realise that, despite her calm, her eyes had never once met his. She had kept them indifferently on her plate,—on the menu, on the room,—anywhere but on him, as if she knew they might betray her. Even now she was looking at the flowers with a little softening of her perfect face into most tender beauty.

"One needs to live in Exile to appreciate jessamine and lilies," she said.

"Haines carried some off last night to give to Miss Playfair," he said deliberately; but his cold grey eyes lightened. Here, if anywhere, was the vulnerable spot in her armour. He watched her covertly to see if that reference at least would not touch her.

She did not, apparently, wince. A sudden silence seemed to fall upon her, and wrap her in a deeper mystery. Her eyes, beneath those thick lashes of hers, seemed to muse upon the flowers; but still she never raised them.

"Haines is so hopelessly in love that he could hardly see the object of his affections," he went on harshly. "The girl would probably have preferred a jack-in-the-box or a peg-top,—anything she could have played with. Who wants to sit down and contemplate a lily until it withers? Certainly not Miss Playfair!"

"But peg-tops and jack-in-the-boxes are not obtainable in Exile," said Claudia Everard with gentle irony. "He might perhaps have found a Japanese toy in the bazaars, if you think it would have pleased her better."

"He wasn't thinking of what would please her—he was pleasing himself with his conception of her. People who fall in love generally do so with their own ideal, not with the honest reality."

There was another painful pause. He felt the pain of it through her silence, and wondered whether Haines himself had guessed!

"Is that your idea of falling in love?" she said

at last with a fine little smile. "It is not mine. The ideal becomes the reality, just as the reality merges into the ideal. Love is a touchstone that goes beyond impressions, and reaches the thing in itself. Ideal and real are only impressions."

"You go too deep for me!" he said, hiding a vague discomfort under his blunt rebuff.

"Anyhow, I do not think we need fear for Mr. Haines. Whatever the issue I think he is gaining a great experience."

"It is putting something into his music that was not there before, anyhow," said Hervey, his cold eyes lightening. "Miss Playfair is not the sort of girl who suggests inspiration, but she is having that effect on Haines. I believe she is musical too. I have not heard her sing yet."

"Have you not?" said Claudia with a fine little smile playing round her lips. "She sang a song one night at Government House of which she did not understand one word—they were very wonderful words!—and then she very nearly sang 'Because' when Mr. Merryn asked her. Mr. Haines just stopped that performance."

Hervey gave a short laugh. "The French version is not bad," he said. "It is the maudlin sentimentality of the English that has damned the thing. A reference to the Deity always fetches the public, or the cheerful statement that though severed on earth they are the more certain to be united in Heaven. I always wonder why, since the logical conclusion is to the contrary."

"It annoys me so when people make appointments to meet you in Heaven exactly as if it were

the teashop round the corner!" said Claudia; and the corners of her mouth trembled into a faint, apologetic smile, as if she feared she had been a trifle drastic over Barbara's singing.

"I know. 'Behind the fifth angel on the right, and don't miss the seraphim, please!' I believe they think the angelic choirs will take the place of the band at the Carlton."

She rose—for the meal was finished—and walked leisurely before him into the further room. Here their coffee was brought to them, and he offered her a cigarette. She lit and smoked it, and he sat and watched her with half-closed eyes. There was something piquant, almost bizarre, in this armed truce between them. When would she break it? Her indifference, the idle fall of her gown, the very smoke ascending in exquisite spirals from the cigarette, seemed to hedge her round with safety and left him at a disadvantage. There would be something rude, almost ill-bred, in mentioning the letter now or his vile suggestion. He kept an obstinate silence, leaving it to her to break down her own reserve; but she never spoke of it. They talked in desultory fashion for half-an-hour, and had it not been for the impatient expectancy in his mind he would have found her charming. He remembered that, when she and her husband first came to Exile, he had known them fairly well for a short time, and Claudia Everard and he had drifted into a kind of friendship. Then a growing distrust of the Chief Justice had made him go less and less to the house and the finish of his work had taken the initiative from him and left him to seek distraction in worse

ways. He had begun that series of entanglements that had ended the other day with Mrs. Bride, and had shunned Mrs. Everard because he had asked nothing but friendship from her. Gradually the baiting of women became less and less of an abstraction, but their dance of death still amused him,—and the more empty and unsatisfying it became the more he disliked the atmosphere that seemed to hold Claudia Everard aloof, until he had come to hate her. The various stages by which he had arrived at his present state of mind and degrading purpose drifted across his memory as she talked to him again as a friend, graciously and freely, until he felt at last that her humiliation was the only thing to restore his self-respect.

A deep-voiced clock somewhere in the house chimed ten, and Mrs. Everard turned her head to listen.

“I am afraid it is no use to expect my husband any longer,” she said. “He will not come to-night.”

He waited patiently, but she made no further comment on the matter. For another half-hour she talked on indifferently, and then rose to say good-night with the same unbroken calm.

“If you will excuse my going to bed so early?” she said with the very slightest lift of that entrancing upper lip. It was almost too slight for a smile.

“I am sure you must be tired after your journey!” he replied, taking her cool, unresponsive hand in his.

“It is so good of you to put me up! I should not have slept a wink over the way, I expect,”

she laughed. "I am sure the beds are not clean, and I should have fancied that the Arabs had slept in them."

"It has been a great pleasure!" he said with fine irony.

"Good-night!"

She turned from him with the same careless grace, and he thought he had never seen a head so beautifully set on a neck as hers. Every curve of her was as perfect as a statue's, and like a statue's as uncompelling. She crossed the large room deliberately, to the staircase which opened upwards from its further end, and then as deliberately came back. He was still standing where she had left him, beside a little table that held a box of cigarettes, ash-trays, and a match-box. She walked up to this table and laid something upon it nearest to where he stood. It was the key of the room he had assigned to her. Then without the least droop of her eyelids she turned away again, and this time really ascended the stairs and left him.

Hervey stood absolutely still, looking down at the key. His face had not altered any more than hers, save that a certain excitement had come into his eyes which was very foreign to them. He thought again of those small white hands and some weapon. . . . Was that what she meant to lure him on to? If she asked for the letter first he would know at once what to expect. His feeling now was not any desire for her—not even the animal desire for her beauty—so much as the excitement of portended battle. It was to be a fight, fought out to the end—and he had longed for a fight, longed to use the maddening

flood of life in his veins, to test his strength. He looked down at his flat, strong wrists, like bars of steel, and did not doubt the issue, even though she held loaded death in her hands. Once let him get within reach, she had no chance. But, oh ! how he loved the excitement of the struggle ! The very uncertainty of what was coming made life worth living. He could have shouted with joy as if intoxicated. The stultifying effect of the life in Exile was passing from him, for this hour at least ; he could almost have blessed the woman for the adventure.

It struck eleven before he moved. Then he picked up the key and, dropping it in his pocket, went up to his own room. Like many very big men he was light on his feet, and he hardly woke the echoes of the echoing house as he passed the door of her room in going to his ; but he wondered if she heard, and prepared herself. The servants had all gone to bed—he had put out the lights downstairs himself. He undressed and bathed, got into his pyjamas, and then—listened. There was no sound in the next room, and for a moment he wondered if after all she had made her escape. Then through the wall he heard a low voice singing—singing the French version of “ Because ”—

“ Lorsque j’entends ton pas, comme en un rêve,
Le folle espoir de te revoir s’élève
Et vainement vers toi je tends les bras—
Quand j’entends ton pas ! ”—

Hervey left his room quietly and walked out into the passage. Her door was only a few yards beyond, and he laid his hand on the handle and turned it. It could not be locked, for the key was in his

pocket. He walked straight into the bedroom, without knocking, and when inside he put the key in the lock and turned it, so that they were locked in together. If she had a weapon he was ready.

Claudia was standing on the other side of the room, brushing out her thick, soft hair. There was no light save the long bars of moonlight through the opened jalousies, but the white blaze showed her to him as plainly as by day. She put down the brush on the dressing-table and, flinging back the mass of her hair over her shoulders, came to him across the room. There was no faltering in her step, but as she neared him he did not recognise her, for her face was transfigured. The marble whiteness was gone, and in its place was a rosy flush which somehow seemed to envelop all her body and make her pulse with life. There were tears in her eyes hanging on those dense lashes, but the maddening upper lip trembled into the tenderest laughter. As she reached him she lifted both arms and laid them round his neck, putting up her mouth to his like a child—but he was too tall for her, and did not stoop his head in the extremity of his amazement.

“Don’t you understand?” she said in a broken whisper. “*I love you!*”

His arms had folded round her mechanically, as they might have done round a child, and he stood holding her as if he did not know what in pity to do with her. It was not till she drew his head down to hers that their lips met, and then he began to tremble and pant like some wild creature first trapped.

"Are you making a fool of me?" he said thickly; and his eyes were almost murderous with the fear of losing what he had hardly gained.

"Look at me and see," she answered fearlessly, dropping her head against his shoulder with a little confiding gesture that made him draw her savagely closer. "Oh, Richmond, don't be so stupid! Can't you understand?"

"But——" he stammered, his face half-buried in her soft, faint-scented hair. "No woman has ever loved me. They have been afraid of me, and—and they said it was hypnotism, but never love. I shouldn't know what to do——" He broke off with a half-angry laugh, and thrust her away from him. "I don't believe it!"

She stood quite patiently, waiting, only the little smile in her eyes that were raised to his. And as suddenly as he had let her go he caught her again, gripping her in his arms so that he hurt her and she caught her breath. "Make a fool of me if you like, but let me believe it!" he said. "For God's sake let me believe it! Tell me every beautiful lie you can think of, and kiss me as if you meant it, or I shall go mad and kill you."

"I should not mind if you did," she said in a low voice. "So long as it was you."

And then there was a sudden silence, and had they listened they would have heard the great free winds of the desert blowing through the moonlight. It was very light in the outside world, and even the garden was only barred with black and silver as the wind swung the shadows of the date-palms over the white walls of the bungalow. The palms made a

curious insistent noise, like the rustle of stiff silk. But the man and woman in the locked room saw and heard nothing save each other. Looking down at her as she stood in the jealous circle of his arms, he saw that her eyelids were drooping as one on the verge of happy sleep, and beneath her lashes the colour of her eyes was as deep as wine.

"Claudia, it isn't all a dream, is it?"

She opened her eyes fully at that, and her expression was rather grave. "You mustn't think that," she said earnestly. "I want you to feel sure. Of course it is all new and strange to you, but I have known it for two years."

"But you couldn't have cared for me all that time! Not from the first?"

"Yes, soon after we came here. I didn't understand what it was at first, and it made me very unhappy. Then it seemed to take possession of me, and I gave up struggling. It was as if a god suddenly entered an empty shrine. I had only to hide my face and worship. Only, I thought you would never know."

"I ought to have known. Look what I have missed for two years! Why didn't you tell me?—somehow."

"Why, I have been telling you, with every breath I drew!" He heard her low tender laughter in the moonlit darkness, and drew his lips lingeringly over her throat and neck. "And then there were—the others," she said with a rather troubled breath. "I never knew that you might not really care for one of them some day."

"Don't!" He winced a little. "I know I

deserve it, but now that I have found you and love together it seems impossible that—I could.”

Again she laughed a little, with the half-sad tenderness one gives to a child. “You think you love me?” she said very gently.

“Give me time to prove it—only time!”

“Oh Ritchie,” she said almost pityingly, “you don’t know the A.B.C. of love yet! Some day you will look back, and—but I could only reach you this way. You couldn’t understand another language—yet. And some day everything will take its proper place.”

“I am ready to learn,” he said almost humbly. “Only, don’t let soul quench sense—I’m too human.”

“Sense is just as divine,” she said quietly, and her arm clasped him reassuringly with a little soft pressure. “What iron muscles! It is as if your strength had become materialised.”

“Did I hurt you? You must blame your own sweetness. And I never knew—I never guessed——”

“Why did you ask me to come to you if you did not love me?” she said a little wonderingly. “I was nearly breathless that day; it came like a streak of light—the chance of my life. I dared not look at you, or you would have seen.”

“I suppose I always loved you,” he said slowly, “and it was that that made me so angry. I wanted to break down your reserve—even to hurt you, and to make you suffer, if I could only force you to feel.”

“You thought I should refuse!”

“I thought you would denounce me—turn on me

—tell me what a cur I was. Even this evening I wondered—well, I wondered if you had a weapon ! ”

“ Ritchie ! ”

“ And then you came across the room like that—one glow—ripe for me and love. Claudia ! say it just once more. I can’t believe it yet.”

And she put her lips to his and formed the words “ I—love—you ” slowly, between the kisses.

CHAPTER X

“ Look down, dear eyes, look down,
Lest you betray her gladness.
Dear brows, do nought but frown,
Lest men miscall my madness.”

W. E. HENLEY.

It had been arranged between them that she should go home after breakfast, before the heat of the day. A messenger was to come from the Fort with any chits that might have arrived, and she had made certain the day before that there should be an envelope in her husband's handwriting. Then it would be easy to say that he had changed his plans and was not staying at the Half-way House, and Othman could order her car and be cognisant of the whole affair.

They had parted at dawn, but they met at the breakfast table with a new and deep content in their eyes. The servants did not wait, and as soon as they were alone he laid his hands on her shoulders and looked down into her face with a long hungry gaze, as if he would lose no line of its beauty.

“ I do not think I can part from you,” he said.

“ I think you must ; there is your work to consider, and your position. I will not do you the least harm if any sacrifice can avoid it.”

“ But you forget that you are sacrificing me, too. Claudia, when will you come to me again ? ”

"I do not know." The brightness of her face faded a little, and her eyes were troubled.

"You know, of course, that this cannot go on. I must have you entirely. There is no question about that?" He spoke with the full force of his will behind the quiet words.

"Then I think we must go home. There would be less scandal in Europe. I am afraid that—yesterday—I hardly looked beyond the moment. It seemed as if the world ended there!"

"When you blush like that you make me think of a rose on fire," he said, and his voice was not quite steady. "Tell me when to throw up my appointment here, or to take leave, and I can be ready in twenty-four hours."

"I must think,"—she said a little pleadingly. "I must think doubly for you, as I see you will not for yourself."

"What does it matter? Nothing matters now, so long as you do not repent." His hands on her shoulders grew heavier, and he looked hard into her face. "You do not repent, do you?" he said hurriedly.

She looked up in sheer amazement, her face glorified again by that curious radiance that had dazzled him last night. "Repent!" she said slowly. "I do not think I could find it in my heart to repent, even if it injured you with the world, and that is the only thing that could trouble me. It cannot injure us in any other way so long as it is love and not lust. I feel as if one half of me had been wanting all my life and I had just become complete. One cannot repent of that!"

"I never saw eyes quite like yours before!" he said suddenly. "I used to think they were wine-coloured. I suppose it is because they are both violet and brown."

"Do let us have breakfast!" said Claudia, laughing. "I am growing so nervous with being criticised that it is taking my appetite away." Then as he stooped to kiss her she added in a whisper, "Ritchie, doesn't it seem natural, our being here like this?"

"Do *you* feel that?" he answered quickly. "I think we must have been living together in some double life from infinity. I know all your tastes—come and sit next me, and don't put the table between us as it was last night."

It was a merry meal, and a very happy one, nor did either of them find that they did not want to eat. People who commit conventional sins are only threatened with conventional punishment, and just as far as they are afraid of such consequences they will suffer. But you cannot try Love in a court of law, or make him subject to the statute-book. Lust indeed may incur a fine and suffer social ostracism; but Love laughs at such hindrances, as he does at marriage. The only penalty that can be inflicted on him is the sacrifice of body and soul on an altar that is not his, an outrage of Nature that avenges itself daily.

"You said you liked the flowers last night," Hervey said, when, their meal finished, they strolled into the further rooms to wait for Mrs. Everard's car and to smoke cigarettes. "Will you take some back with you? I should like to give you as many

as you can carry." And then he marvelled at himself, for he remembered what he had said of Haines. Only twenty-four hours, and lo! he was doing the very same thing, and finding flowers an appropriate gift with which to fill the hands of his lady.

"I should love them," said Claudia; and then she added demurely, "But are you sure that you would not rather give me a peg-top or a jack-in-the-box—something that I could play with?"

"Did you remember that? So did I—and I thought what a fool I was not to understand Haines, though you must allow that you are not in the least like Miss Playfair. I want to give you flowers, and jewels, and the richest silks that can be bought—everything that is beautiful!"

"And material!" she added quietly. "Dear Ritchie, give me something better. Flowers are always welcome; they seem to me symbolical. But for your jewels I will have patient service, and for your silks trust and faith."

"But don't you see that they mean the same thing to men?" he pleaded. "We are very clumsy, but we want to express our devotion that way—we want to *give*."

She flushed that sudden intoxicating colour all over the dead whiteness of her skin. "I ought to understand," she said in a lower tone. "I also wanted to give, however material the gift."

He drew her against him for a moment, holding her so that she felt the heavy throbbing of his heart under his broad chest. "It means so much to me!" he said rather pitifully. "It means that you are my woman and I am your man. I am afraid I shouldn't

believe you loved me without it—not one man in a hundred would ! ”

“ I know. That was why I gave—partly. Oh, don’t think it means nothing to me, or that it is not a—pleasure.” The word came bravely, but the clear red blood ran up even to the golden hair. “ Only, it isn’t everything.”

Perhaps he could not quite follow her as faithfully as he wished, for he changed the subject. “ I forgot,” he said, and while he still held her he drew an envelope from his pocket. “ Here is the letter you asked for.”

He watched her while she took and held it indifferently. “ It was the means to an end,” she said quietly. “ Not the end from the means. But perhaps I had better take it. I do not like to see the fear that this caused, in any human being.”

“ I ought to tell you that it is not the only danger threatening Everard,” he said slowly. “ Had that letter been made public, what he feared was the Arab population, and I know he had cause. But there is a Petition gone home to the Colonial Secretary praying for inquiry into certain charges against him, which must end in investigation. It may be a longer process than the native rising which would have wreaked its vengeance on him, but it is bound to come. If he does not know of this you had better tell him.”

She did not look startled, only a little graver. “ Yes, I will tell him,” she said. “ I have been hoping that he would go home—that the scandal might be avoided somehow.”

She moved away from him swiftly as the sound of

the car fell on her ears, and a minute later Othman announced its appearance. Then she went up to her room to cloak and veil herself, and in a few minutes returned, the same grey, mysterious figure of her arrival last night.

"Good-bye!" she said composedly, offering him her hand in the presence of several of the servants who were in waiting. "I am sorry to have trespassed on you in my husband's name; it was so stupid of me to make a mistake about his plans—but I am very glad I came."

The secret daring of the words almost made him smile. She had the advantage under her veil, and he would have liked to see the shining of the deep-coloured eyes, the lift of her pretty upper lip. "It is I who am in your debt for a delightful evening," he said courteously. "You saved me from my own company. If Mr. Everard does decide to break the journey here, will you let me know?"

"I expect he will come straight through—when he does come," she said evasively. "Good-bye!"

He followed her out to the car and helped her in, his hand for one moment on her waist, but he did not risk a private word, for he knew in his own mind that he meant to see her again very soon, with more opportunity for intimate speech. Then there was the whirring of the starter—it was a hired car, and old-fashioned—and she was rolling out of sight away into the desert, soon a mere speck on the grey-toned sands. But the face of all the world had changed since her advent.—

Claudia leaned back in her seat tranquilly, mind and body at peace. She had neither scruples nor

qualms, which belong to lesser experiences, and the great forces of her passion seemed to have swept ordinary considerations aside. The merely titular claim of the man who was her husband had never weighed with her, since she was to her own mind no more than his housekeeper; the restrictions of a conventional morality and a social verdict only mattered so far as they affected Hervey and must be safeguarded only on his account. As far as she was herself concerned she would have walked out of her husband's house, and gone with Hervey to the ends of the earth at a moment's notice; but she was as careful for his future as she might have been for her own son's. She wanted time for consideration, as she had told him—time to weigh the drawbacks of a divorce, the scandal that would ensue, and the necessity of his leaving Exile on her account. His work there was really finished, but he might have looked for acknowledgment from his Government, and even honours. Influential men spoke of a K.C.M.G. for him when he should go home, and an important post. Both these he must relinquish for a life with her. She was jealous for him, and would fain have contrived that he should "eat his cake and have it" after the manner of women. The masculine mind is generally more philosophic with regard to the limitations of the proverb. Anyhow, it required thinking over.

When Mrs. Everard arrived at her own bungalow she was informed that Mr. Murgatroyd had rung her up last evening after she had started for the Half-way House, and that he would call this afternoon if she would see him. There was no

necessity to telephone if she would be in. Claudia turned a little cold as she faced some new communication from her husband, and realised the possibility of Murgatroyd following her out last night. That he had not done so seemed a grace of Providence. She sat down to wait and compose her nerves.

He came at five and found her awaiting him, unaltered to her own consciousness, but with a new flushed beauty that kept his bewildered gaze on her. He was always prone to sit and watch her out of cavernous eyes, and she had grown used to it as one grows used to the patient attendance of a dog ; but to-day he could not if he would have removed his gaze from the wonder of her face. Her eyes seemed brimful of tenderness for all the world, and to include even him in their wide radiance. He sat and basked in it, dazedly, like some poor insect long denied the sun.

"Well, Stanley!" she said kindly, looking up at his pallid, emaciated face. "Any news?"

"Edgar wrote yesterday—very urgently. He wants to know if you have accomplished anything ; he must return before the court sits, or—or go further away." He lowered his voice and spoke almost hoarsely in his excitement. "He is so unreasonable!" he burst out, still in that suppressed voice. "He is wrong to set you such a task. I told him it was impossible for you or any human being to get that letter."

"But I have got the letter!"

He remained staring down at her from his great height—for he looked taller than he was owing to

being so thin—without attempting to sit down. His eyes seemed to recede until they became mere pinpoints of incredulity and suspicion. He seemed stricken dumb, and yet he was still distracted by her new beauty even from the shock of her words.

“Sit down, Stanley, and I will tell you about it,” she said kindly. She had decided on what she must say, and how explain her possession of the letter. “I went out to Half-way House yesterday under the excuse of meeting Edgar—really to get speech with Mr. Hervey. He gave up the letter, but he warned me that there is a new danger on foot—one he seems to consider as unavoidable,—a Petition to have Edgar’s judgments inquired into. Have you heard of it?”

“No! But how did you——”

“He admitted that Edgar was unpopular with the Arabs, but he seemed to think this inquiry a more certain disaster for him. Stanley, what are we to do?”

He did not answer, save by another question. He still looked bewildered.

“But you have got the letter?”

“Yes, I have got the letter, but after all Edgar’s fear may have exaggerated its effects in Exile. The Petition is a slower method of being revenged on him, but I think the Europeans will carry it through.”

“If you have got the letter Edgar will not care—he will snap his fingers in the face of their Petition, and come back and carry the cases through.”

“Oh, Stanley, he must not!” Her face altered into real distress. “He must be made to understand how serious it is—I hoped he would go home.”

“Not before he has got rid of Azeopardi. He has vowed to clear Hassan’s way and his own—he will get control of the silk trade whatever happens.”

She was silent for a minute, thinking. “Perhaps he had better come back, and I can talk to him myself. I can generally make him—understand,” she said with unintentional irony.

Murgatroyd did not answer, but sat looking at her still under the shadow of his hand, which he held over his eyes as if to screen them from the glare of the outside world, for the shutters were wide open. There was something almost sinister in this scrutiny, or she fancied so, and she said almost sharply, “Will you telegraph for me?”

He started as if caught dreaming, and appeared as nervous as she. “Oh, certainly,” he said hastily, taking a note-book from his pocket. “In code, of course.”

“No, I think not. It looks more suspicious. We must not lose a point. Simply put that we are expecting him to-morrow, or next day, and add ‘Please confirm.’ He will understand that, and it will only look as if you wanted to be sure of some arrangement already made by letter.”

He was busy writing the message to her suggestion; but suddenly he flung the book on to the table and started up, surprising her so that she nearly rose also.

“He ought never to have dragged you into this!” he said, with a criticism of the Chief Justice very unlike himself. “He ought at least to have kept one thing sacred. Why were you sent out to that

man to run the risk of being thought privy to it ? Why——”

“All Exile will think me privy to it, Stanley,—they probably think so now !”

“It—is not a business for women,” he said incoherently. “If Edgar chooses to take risks that is another thing ; he has a great stake. I do not blame him !” he added defiantly, but when had he ever blamed Everard ? “He ought anyhow to have screened you.”

She looked at him with that same surprise, wondering at his agitation. She had never known Murgatroyd so self-assertive before in his own opinion, though he could uphold Everard’s. “It does not matter,” she said quietly. “Perhaps he will let me go home.”

“Yes”—he caught eagerly at the word. “He ought to send you home before there can be any unpleasantness for you. I shall tell him so !”

“You !” she said with a little gentle mockery. “Why, Stanley, he would argue you out of your opinion in five minutes, and prove himself in the right and you in the wrong. When have you ever been able to hold your own with Edgar ?”

“Never—till now,” he agreed unexpectedly. “He always seems so right. But in this I am sure that he is *not* right, and I can stand to my colours when I have a strong enough motive. You shall see.” He rose to take his leave, but lingered a minute looking at the bowl of jessamine and gold-more blossoms on the table. “What beautiful flowers !” he said gently. “I never realised how one misses them in a room. And they look so right

here, with you." She did not answer, save by encircling the bowl with her hands and drawing it to her as if she drew a precious memory. "Is it the flowers that have made you so happy?" he said.

"Happy!" she echoed a little startled, and the blood rushed up over her pale face. "Do I look so—happy?"

"I have never seen you quite like this," he said; and she thought his voice was not steady. "There is something so wonderful—something in your face. I thought I knew every line of it—I come here so much, you see—and now it seems that I never knew it at all."

She bent her face above the flowers as if to hide it and touch them with her lips unknown to him. "I am of course very relieved about Edgar," she said with an effort. "And—yes!—the flowers were a great pleasure!"

"Hervey gave them to you?"

"He told his butler to cut me a bunch."

"I wish *I* had given them to you—to bring that look into your face they must have given you such intense pleasure!" he said a little wildly.

She was dumb. Had any other man given her the jessamine and goldmore blossoms they would have been just flowers—lovely in themselves, and welcome in Exile, nothing more. She realised that what she had said was true—flowers were symbolical to her, given by Richmond Hervey,—they were not among his usual gifts to women. When she looked up Murgatroyd had gone. The removal of his long, dank presence was a relief, especially

with that oddness in his manner. She wondered if she had betrayed herself, and rising went to the mirror to look. It reflected the same dull gold crown of hair, oval face, and proud sweet beauty ; but the eyes were full of a radiance that was almost shamed, the lips said " Kiss me ! " to an absent lover, the blood came and went at his bidding even in memory. She saw her secret triumphantly confessed in every line of her likeness in the mirror, as if love had already crowned her. With a sound between a laugh and a cry she hid her face in her hands.

" That is the woman that he loves ! " she said.

CHAPTER XI

“ Our life is like a curious play
Where each man acteth to himself.
‘ Let us be open as the day ! ’
One mask doth to another say,
That he may deeper hide himself.
(‘ Let us be open as the day ! ’
That he may deeper hide himself.)
And so the world goes round and round,
Until our life with rest is crowned—
Ah, well is thee thou art asleep ! ”

ANON.

THE Chief Justice returned the next day. His motor car ran straight into the Fort, without stopping at Half-way House or in the village for water. It was generally necessary to carry both water and petrol in the desert, as well as lubricating oil, and if the passengers' own strength could stand it there was nothing to prevent cars running through, though they started at daybreak to get in at night. Usually it was the travellers who broke down, and not the automobiles. Those hours, end on end, in the intensity of the desert were trying to anything like sensitive nerves or a weak constitution. People stopped at Hassan's because the last ten miles were intolerable, as much as to feed the car. But the Chief Justice was made of iron as far as bodily ailments went. The irony of his leave at Health had

been patent to half Exile when he went out there "for a necessary change." He could sit five days a week all the year round and not feel it.

In the dusk of the evening he came once more, entering his bungalow less like a thief than he had left it, but with uncertainty still in his watching eyes and head turned over his shoulder. Claudia met him on his entrance, and he could hardly wait the departure of the servants from the room to hear her news.

"Well?" he said feverishly. "Stanley wired me that you were expecting me. That can only mean one thing. You would not expect me as long as there was danger in my return. *Well?*"

"I have got the letter, Edgar."

"Do you mean that—that Hervey—gave it up to you?" He stammered in his excitement.

"Yes."

"It isn't the right one then; he has made a fool of you!" he broke out suddenly, with a bitter disappointment that made her look at him curiously. She wondered if he were going to cry? His absolute indifference to others' welfare so long as his own was assured had always made him invulnerable, since he had secured his own by all the talent granted him. But now that old fortification was down he seemed like a child, with a child's want of settled purpose.

"No, it is your letter. I have read it," she said slowly.

"But why did he give it up? What did he want in return? What am I to pay him? How slow you are in answering, Claudia!" He was almost in a frenzy, leaning his hands upon the table between them, his convulsed face thrust towards hers. She

was looking at him with a slow wonder that ever, years ago, she could have thought him handsome. The narrowness of the face and the sensual lips seemed to take from it any advantage of the straight, thin features and brilliant, near-set eyes. Yet there were many people who admitted that the Chief Justice was handsome, whatever their opinion of him. His wife suddenly saw that his face was ugly.

"He did not ask any concessions either in Reserve or Fort," she said dully. "He would not listen to a bribe of money. Do you not see that he *could* not?" she asked with slow scorn.

"Oh, you mean it would have been dangerous, in turn, for him! But he had us in a wedge—we could not have used it against him. He might have made what terms he liked!" He spoke almost with a gasp, and she realised that he was putting himself in Hervey's place and thinking what he could have done himself—how he could have wrung concessions, and ground the last ounce out of a victim so at his mercy as he had been at Hervey's.

"He did not set so much value on the letter as you did; he does not understand bodily—fear!" said Claudia. Her lips felt a little stiff, and she wondered if this lesson that she had carefully taught herself sounded as unnatural as it did to her. "There is a Petition gone home to the Colonial Secretary praying for inquiry into certain charges against you. He warned me of it. Edgar, did you know? He seemed to think it more final for you than the letter."

But he laughed, loudly and mirthlessly, as Murgatroyd had said he would. "Let them petition

as much as they please!" he said. "It will be months before anything is done, and by that time I—— It was the letter that might have destroyed me, here, now, on the spot"—and he shuddered. "Have you got it there?" he added hastily.

She drew the envelope out of her breast and held it towards him. He snatched at it, glanced at his own handwriting, and began to tear it across and across without further investigation. Then as if changing his mind he gathered the pieces into an ash-tray on the table, and striking an unsteady match set fire to them. "You read the letter? You are sure it was mine?" he said.

"Yes, I read it."

The flames curled up recklessly, threatening danger; but there were no draperies to burn in this house. A little black ash floated away on to the floor, and he flicked at the remainder with his finger.

"I trust you, my dear—if *you* have read the letter he cannot have put me off with a hoax," he said with a ghastly lightness. "There goes Hervey's power over me! The fool! But tell me the details, Claudia. How long have you had this? God, what a weight off me! Why did you let me stay out at that cursed place—at Health—all this time? You ought not to have kept me there!" He was querulous in his reaction.

"I have only had the letter for some thirty-six hours. Stanley wired to you as soon as I got back."

"But you were to meet Hervey more than a week ago, at Government House. Did you not go?"

"Yes, I went, but he was going away with the

Admiral for a week's cruise. It was difficult to get an interview."

"I see—I see. You are always clever, Claudia—you never lose your head, or rush things. Well, and then?"

She had shuddered a little—a long convulsion of her straight slight limbs that shook her from head to foot as he gloated over her success; but she answered in the same even tone. "Then I went out to Half-way House on excuse of meeting you returning from Health."

"Capital! And he could not refuse to see you?"

"I dined with him that night, as they were not prepared at Hassan's, and we talked it out."

"And then you came straight back? With the letter?"

"I slept out there that night; I had to. It was late when—when we had finished talking."

"Oh, of course—I meant the next morning. But I wonder he gave it up so tamely!" His elation faded a little. He glanced up sharply in suspicion, not of her, but of the man he feared. "Do you think he has something else up his sleeve?—some new dodge that makes the letter useless?"

"Only what I told you—the Petition. I am sure, from his manner, that that is a grave matter, Edgar."

He snapped his fingers. "They may go to hell with the Petition. The silk trade is ours!" he said assuredly. "We are as safe as a church. What beats me is how you argued him out of his own 'down' on me—but Hervey was always a straw in a woman's hands!"

The contemptuous arrogance of the tone met a sudden response in Mrs. Everard's impassive face. She flushed to meet it, a sudden scarlet anger that faded but left her face very softly proud, as if she took up arms for something unspoken. Everard's narrow eyes had again been fixed on the pile of black ash as if fascinated. When he chanced to raise them and looked at his wife he seemed to find something there to catch his attention.

"Of course you are the most beautiful woman in Exile," he said, as if repeating a fact well known to him, but impressed on him afresh. "A beautiful woman pleading for her husband proved too much even for his shrewdness, eh, Claudia? I should like to have heard you! You must have looked magnificent."

"It was a purely business interview," said Mrs. Everard coldly. There was a faint disgust in her tone that he seemed to appreciate.

"Repulsive, anyhow, for you, poor girl! And you have never been one of his idols, even from a distance. But you are a beauty all the same, my dear! and you couldn't prevent his seeing it."

He spoke with a certain triumph in the possession of her as a useful asset; but she recognised something more—something that struck a shock of alarm all along her sharpened senses. The mere thought that her appeal to another man had been successful increased her value in his eyes. The idea of her beauty attracting Hervey—however unwilling he believed it on her part—made it attract him also. He had a palate that must be stimulated with sauces to make healthy food eatable, as Claudia knew;

his mental palate was being stimulated by Hervey's supposed admiration with the same effect. He had lived in daily intercourse with her for years, and had found her fulfil all the needs of a figurehead to his household; but he had never seen her excite more than the appreciation accorded a fine picture by other men. Now already she felt his eyes steal to her again and again, and that extra sense on guard over the sacredness of her love warned her that if he had excuse he would move nearer to her—touch her.

She drew back, almost with a cry, and turned to take refuge in her room. "You must be very tired, and you have had nothing to eat," she said in her ordinary voice. "I have dined already, but I told Abdul to have a second meal ready. Do you mind if I go to bed? The last two days have been very tiring, as you may suppose, and I slept badly last night."

He had no excuse to detain her, but he seemed slightly disappointed. "I have not half done talking it over yet," he said. "I want to hear exactly what you said and what he said. But if you want to go——"

"I do really; and I do not remember exactly what was said. It was very painful, as you may imagine. He guessed that I was not entirely in your confidence, and he carefully unfolded all your plans to me, and what you had already accomplished!" A faint bitterness was on her lips in spite of her measured voice, and he shrank from it.

"Yes, of course he would—curse him!" he said hastily. "Poor Claudia! Well, good-night!"

He made a slight movement towards her at last, almost as if he would shake hands. They had not kissed for years, and the mockery of a handshake between them set her on her guard again. She said carelessly "Good-night!" and passed into her room locking her door behind her.

Then her limbs began to tremble, and she sat down in a long resting chair, as if the strain had been greater than she knew. It was not that she feared her husband's discovery of what had happened between Hervey and herself, for had it not been for Hervey's position she would have told him and been indifferent to any consequences to herself. But she was vaguely afraid of something that she saw in men's eyes now that love had crowned and glorified her. It was as if she were radiated by an inward fire, and they, not knowing of its source, yet craved to warm themselves at its flame. She knew from her reflection in the glass that her beauty had never reached its consummation until now; there had been a something lacking, as it might be in a nearly perfect work of art by an inferior craftsman who had just missed the inspiration of genius. Now that she had been completed and absorbed in one man she was aghast at the effect upon others who were nothing to her and who stood outside the charmed circle. Murgatroyd's stammering bewilderment last night when he looked in her face had startled her, though she could not extinguish the glory that betrayed her; but her husband's dawning attraction to-day was far worse. It had even diverted his attention from pressing the point of her unexplained success in getting possession

of the letter, or had given him a reason, half-formulated, half-suppressed, in the darker workings of his mind. He had not doubted her, but he had doubted Hervey ; and out of the doubt had arisen the competitive instinct of some men who cannot desire until they see another do so. When she was merely his legitimate property he had had no inclination for her, but the suggestion of her attracting other men whetted his appetite as the sauces of the dinner he was even now eating in the next room. It dawned upon her that if she had had even the atmosphere of the prostitute she would have held his fancy longer, and she shuddered.

After a few minutes she heard a sudden arrival in the outer room, an exclamation of pleasure from her husband, and voices. For a minute she nearly cried out, in her excitement, her mood was so tense ; but one thing the burden of her love had taught her in two years—an almost perfect self-control. She forced herself to sit still, listening, and then she recognised Murgatroyd's voice. He had come round, late though it was, to see his chief, and it proved a welcome interruption. She breathed more freely, and rising began slowly to unbind her heavy gold hair. Edgar would not at least think of her now—he would not brood on a dangerous new atmosphere about her. The voices of the two men were only audible to Mrs. Everard in an even monotone, and she could not catch their words. After the first few sentences of greeting before the Arab servant the subject uppermost in both their minds found expression, and the Chief Justice burst into it almost as breathlessly as he had done to his wife.

"Stanley, you know that it is all right with me? Claudia got the letter!"

Murgatroyd did not reflect the exuberance in Everard's face even faintly, as he usually did. Up till now he had seemed in some way a pale copy of the man whose more brilliant personality swayed him, whether Everard's mood were bright or dark. But to-night his sombre eyes neither lit up nor responded to good news.

"Yes, I know," he said tonelessly. "I came to speak to you——"

"I burnt it!" the Chief Justice broke in, rubbing his long fine hands in a kind of frenzy of enjoyment. "I saw it drop to ash, and with it that cursed man's power over me! I wish I could get round on Hervey—I wish I could hold him in my hand as he held me. I would not let him go until I had squeezed the last drop of resistance out of him! I'd pay back that ten days at Health minute by minute!" He drew his lips back from his sharp white teeth—rather brittle teeth, slightly pointed as cannibals' are said to be, but very white—and his restless eyes were full of ugly light. Had he been an animal he would have shown the whites of them. But his venom met with no more response from Murgatroyd than his elation.

"Why did you send Claudia to him?" he asked heavily, his lowering face turned on Everard with singular intentness. "Why was she dragged into it at all?"

"Why, Stanley, you don't doubt *Claudia*! She is as firm as a rock—as safe as a church. She was my winning card; I did the best thing possible in

sending her. And she has proved it!" he added with a return of his exultation.

"Nevertheless she ought not to have been mixed up in a dirty job like that," said Murgatroyd, with a sudden roughness that was so unexpected that the Chief Justice almost started. "It is not women's work!"

Everard's eyes narrowed, stared at him, as if trying to read him and to explain this amazing phenomenon of his satellite with an opinion differing from his own. "Claudia has the head of a man!" he said almost soothingly, as if feeling his way. "And—what you seem to forget—she is my wife. If I trust any one with my interests I must trust her."

The cloud on Murgatroyd's face seemed to darken until it became visible in the dull blood rising under his sallow skin. He turned with what in him might almost be suppressed fury on his dominator.

"No, I do not forget that she is your wife—but it seems to me that you did," he said fiercely. "Is there nothing you hold sacred, Edgar, that you will not use to your own interest? Did you not remember that she might meet with rudeness, even insult, from that man after what you had already done? You had no right to submit her to it—no right, I say!"

"Stanley!"

"I will be no party to the scheme if Claudia is to be a victim to it," said the Crown prosecutor wildly. "She ought to go to Europe—to go home. She is too fine to drag her down to our level, whatever we

may think fit to do. Make money for her as you like—pile it up to pour into her lap!—but don't soil her in the making."

Everard had been watching him with those narrowed eyes, incredulity, suspicion, and a certain mean shrewdness chasing each other across his face like lightning over the desert. As he ended he threw his head up with a jarring laugh.

"It's pretty obvious what's the matter with you!" he said coarsely. "Making a divinity of another man's wife, eh? I am not careful enough of Claudia to your mind—you would be a better guardian, you think."

All the dark blood receded from Murgatroyd's face and left him ghastly, but he was not to be brow-beaten this time. "You can think what you please, Edgar," he said, like some despised thing driven to bay. "I never said one word to Claudia you might not hear—I have never had a hope——"

"Claudia would hardly encourage—you!" said Everard with slow, stinging contempt, looking at the long, sallow face and emaciated frame as if he looked upon some repulsive reptile. "You need not trouble to exonerate yourself. Claudia can contrast us at her leisure, any day of the week." He smiled half insolently, as if completely satisfied with his own face and figure; and indeed he had never admired any man so much as the one he saw in the mirror. "Nevertheless, I don't care to have you lecturing me on my duty to my wife, from the standpoint of your own dirty passion for her," he added with a sudden fierce brutality. "You had better drop it, once and for all. I'll forget what you've

said this time ; but you'll have to put your heel on your devotion to Claudia and let me hear no more about it."

This was one of Everard's trump cards in dealing with any nature weaker than his own—the quick change from scathing ridicule to savage brutality. He had used it with effect all through his official career, and with those unfortunately subservient to him. It was noticeable that he never attempted it with his wife, or with those whom he recognised as his masters in life. Hitherto a mere hint of it had held the Crown prosecutor in bondage, though there had been little occasion to excuse even the worst of his judicial sentences to him. Murgatroyd had not seemed too nice about the misuse of power himself, nor was he scrupulous in business dealings. This new feeling for Claudia seemed to have stricken him suddenly mad.

"I have told you already," he said in a perfectly steady voice, "that you can think what you please. If you want to quarrel with me you must do so. But I will maintain that you are wrong if you allow Claudia to be mixed up in this ; and you have no right to sacrifice her by sending her to plead for you with a man like Hervey. It must not happen again, Edgar, whatever strait we are in."

For a minute the Chief Justice did not speak. He was tasting the bitterness of finding that a ready tool had blunted in his hand and threatened to injure him if he risked using it too roughly. He and Murgatroyd could not afford to quarrel with each other—his quicker brains saw that, while the slower man was too absorbed in his devotion to an ideal to

think of safety or anything else. He was a grotesque knight-errant, but his indifferent personality did not detract from the force of his purpose, and he must be reckoned with. There was a sudden change in Everard's manner as he turned to him, almost moist-eyed and with a tremble in his voice that was not all assumed, for when a man feels the very stones under his feet threatening to fail his stability he may well cry out on fortune. Murgatroyd had been no more than a stone, but a familiar well-used thing on which he depended for his foothold, and he could have wept over his defection for the humiliation of it as well as its danger.

"Look here, Stanley, I spoke harshly," he said with the manner that unobservant people called "winning." "But you made me mad. I love Claudia—in spite of our apparent indifference we are very dear to each other—and it would have been as intolerable to her as to me to guess that you had thought of her in any other light than as a friend." With that new impression of her upon him he almost believed what he said; and at least, if he had not loved her of late years, there could be no doubt that she loved him! "Of course, I don't wonder," he went on. "Being as intimate as you have been, and Claudia's beauty, you'd have been a stone to have resisted." He forgot that most men had been stones to Claudia Everard up to now and had not found it hard to resist at all.

Even now Murgatroyd did not meet his advances with the enthusiasm he expected. He remained staring at a bowl of flowers on the table—the jessamine and lilies over which he had seen her bend

that radiant face—and he spoke sullenly still, though the anger had died out of his voice also.

“I don’t wish to quarrel with you any more than you with me, Edgar. God knows I’ve admired you as I do no other man, and I’d have followed you half-way to hell! But this one thing can’t be. I’ve never done Claudia any wrong by my worst thought—I’ve worshipped her like a goddess—but I won’t see her dragged through the mud with all of us.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Everard, as if in graceful concession. “I will talk it over with her, and she shall go home. I may go myself before many months are out,” he added significantly.

They parted friends, but the bitterness was not out of the Chief Justice’s mind, whatever might be the case with the Crown prosecutor. He had lost his power in some strange way that he could not understand. He could no longer talk over an unwilling witness to his side, or convince men and women against their will. He had been face to face with a mightier pleader than himself, though he did not recognise it, and love had risen triumphant above all the art and subtlety and cunning of evil.

CHAPTER XII

“ I have taken that vow—
And you were my friend,
But yesterday—now
All that’s at an end,
And you are my husband and claim me, and I must depend.

“ Yesterday I was free,
Now you, as I stand,
Walk over to me
And take hold of my hand.
You look at my lips, your eyes are too bold, your smile is
too bland.”

JAMES STEPHENS.

THERE was a dance once a week at Exile Club. The Marines’ band came down to play, and people danced in the big room upstairs, and sat out on the landing outside if the wind were blowing too hard in the verandah. It was rather too intimate in the Club for successful dancing; there was no getting away from your neighbours, and people sitting out were overheard by lookers-on, and the dancers ran into each other round the walls or were jammed in the middle of the room. Nevertheless it was an institution and “something to do” in the listless phrase of those stationed there. Many a dreary festivity continues to flourish in Exile for the sake of cheating monotony of a few hours.

Barbara Playfair’s first appearance at a Club

dance took place after her engagement was announced, and left every man in the Fort with a feeling of injury in consequence. When you are meeting the same people every day, and dancing with them every week, the advent of a new-comer is a boon that ought to be free to competition for a month at least. Moreover, she was a girl, and at the moment the only girl in Exile, except the Vanburens' French governess, who was not attractive. All the bachelors felt that the Colonial Secretary had taken more than his innings in annexing her within a week of her arrival, and all the married men grumbled because she would not now have dances enough to go round if Haines took every other one, which the beast would surely do. Barbara had, in fact, arrived with a programme already much engaged, for besides Haines' legitimate claims she had given Mr. Merryn two and the Admiral one. The Admiral had been the best waltzer in the Navy some years ago, and could pick and choose still amongst the limited number of partners. Fortunately for the surplus of men who were still awaiting their chance, Mr. Smyth, the secretary, did not dance.

When the Government House party appeared the dance had already begun, being an informal affair; but the waltz stopped, and the Marines played "God save the King," to Barbara's intense delight. It was the first time she had entered a room to the National Anthem, and she stared with all her blue eyes at her uncle's objection.

"Silly nonsense!" said the Admiral. "I've told them times enough not to treat me like a Punch

and Judy show unless it's some official affair and there's a big pot with us. 'Rooty-toot!—here he comes!' I might just as well take a drum and fife with me."

"Oh, but, Uncle Jonathan, I think it's lovely! And you're the King's representative; don't you feel it wonderful?"

"No, my dear, I don't, and the King doesn't either, I bet, when they National Anthem him at every tea-fight and penny-farthing meeting that he has to attend. A sensible man like that, and a sailor too, don't want to be drummed in and out of his ship when he's simply going ashore out of uniform! Anyhow, I don't!—Hulloa! there's the Chief Justice, back at last."

"Hateful man!" said Lady Stroud in a cheerful aside. "How beautiful his wife looks to-night!"

Mr. and Mrs. Everard were coming across the dancing-room as she spoke to greet the Governor. The Chief Justice walked well, with a certain grace and vigour that made him seem younger than he was, and his thin, handsome face certainly looked the better for his change of air. There was something almost aggressive in his smile as he shook hands with the Admiral and Lady Stroud and was introduced to Barbara—something more than ever assured of his own charm and power to please.

"Have you any dances left, Miss Playfair?" he said at once. "I know if I don't get one now that I shan't have a chance in another five minutes!"

"You promised some last week, didn't you, Barbara?" Lady Stroud put in, without haste,

but quite firmly. "You mustn't forget Captain Bunney and Mr. Yarrow."

"Yes, but we didn't settle what numbers," said Barbara literally. "And I never can remember without a programme—I'm afraid it is first come first served."

"I shall be the first to come!" said Everard confidently. "Which are Mr. Haines' numbers—even or uneven?"

"Oh—uneven!" The girl laughed a little and flushed faintly at this wholesale allotment.

"I shan't try for a single uneven then. This is the second dance—Haines will have the third, I know; I will come for the fourth, Miss Playfair, and the eighth with your consent."

"Don't be too generous, Barbara!" warned Lady Stroud. "You will find you have only one to spare to each claimant if you are to be fair."

"Miss Playfair doesn't want to be fair; she wants to enjoy herself!" said Everard boastfully. "And it's up to me to see that she does so." He laughed at Barbara with a quick flash of his brilliant eyes and a white gleam of teeth, which seemed to promise the mirth and carelessness dear to youth, and she thought him charming.

But when she came to waltz with Haines—the next dance, as Everard had foretold—she found that he was not pleased at the prospect of her dancing with the Chief Justice.

"What made you give him a dance, child?" he said quickly, guiding her skilfully in and out of the crowded couples. He steered well, but he did not swing her round and round with the solid activity

that she called dancing. "You could surely have made an excuse with so many engagements already!"

"I never thought of it," said Barbara blankly. "He asked me, and he was very nice, and I do so admire Mrs. Everard!"

"Yes, but"—he laughed in a vexed fashion—"however much you may admire a woman it doesn't follow that her husband is a good sort, unfortunately. I had rather that you had not danced with him."

"Don't you like him then, Rodney?"

She looked a little troubled, a little downcast, having failed already to do the thing he would have preferred. Had he asserted an authority over her, even in so small a matter, she would have resented it, no doubt, and insisted on doing as she pleased; but he had somehow given her a feeling that he was a little disappointed at her lack of taste, and that she had not shown the right intuition with regard to the Chief Justice.

"He is rather a cad, I think," said Haines frankly. "I never thought him good enough for his wife, though many people find her rather dull and pity him."

"They are a very handsome pair, I think," said Barbara, but her tone still fell flat. "They are dancing together now."

She was wondering what it felt like to dance with your own husband, and whether years of married life made any difference to the pleasure of it. She hoped not. She was enjoying the motion so much, and Haines waltzed very well even though he did not go with the abandonment that she had hitherto

preferred. But she could not honestly say that she would rather dance with him than with any man present just because they were engaged, and it worried her that she did not feel such a preference beyond question. He was so tender and devoted, and at moments so impassioned, that she would fain have met him at equal depth, feeling with real humility that he was giving her more than he gained. She was always saying to herself, "Now I really love him!" catching at the moment before it came. But it never seemed to come.

Barbara was right in saying that the Chief Justice was dancing with his wife, but it was the only time that evening. He had urged her to go to the Club dance, though she would have preferred his going alone, and partly to escape his importunities, and partly because it seemed a more normal and natural thing to do, she accompanied him. She did not even know who might be there, but her instinct told her that Hervey would not be. He was still waiting for a sign or a summons from her, and she had given none. But she had no sooner entered the motor with Everard to drive down to the Club than she began to suspect it was a mistake. Since his arrival the previous night she had kept out of his way, and as he had been obliged to be in Reserve all day—to see and consult with Hassan and other members of the silk ring, as she suspected—they had had no opportunity for speech in private. In the car she had felt him moving stealthily nearer to her, and once he had referred to her mission anent the letter with a suddenness that nearly made her cry out.

"If Hervey could see you now, Claudia, he would

give up a dozen letters! I don't wonder you got round the surly brute. That blue gauze thing over your head makes you enough to warm up any man—even your own husband, my dear!" He laughed softly, and it had a wicked sound to her through the smooth running of the car. "God! but he must have cursed me for owning you!" he added a little thickly.

Again she recognised that whetted appetite through the admiration of another man, and her profile almost sharpened in the restraint she put upon herself. It seemed to her dreadful even to be sitting there beside Everard, and she would like to have thrown herself out of the car and run. Her dark distended eyes went to the jagged outlines of the Rocks and rested there as if their unassailable strength reassured her.

"There was no question of personal persuasion," she said icily. "It was a business matter. I told you so before."

"You don't realise your own attractions, Claudia!" he said with that horrible laugh.

She shrugged her shoulders and relapsed into silence in the furthest corner of the car. Later on, when he asked her to dance with him, she had no reason to refuse. They often danced together because their steps suited, "and for the look of the thing," as he had frankly told her. But his clasp was noxious and sought to press her nearer while she stealthily held away; his eyes gloating on her face made her feel a little sick. She wondered for the first time if he looked so at the Arab women of Banishment, where he had that house of which she had known nothing.

She would not dance with him again, though he pestered her and almost sulked when she accepted other men as partners. She had no lack of applicants to-night, and her dull surprise was merged in thankfulness for the means of escape. Sometimes, for all her face and figure, she had sat out a dance or so, but one seemed hardly over before another man was begging for the next. She suspected the cause in herself, and it made her blush and tremble.

During the evening it chanced that she was sitting with Lady Stroud—had in fact taken refuge with her—when Barbara came back between the dances to report herself to her chaperon. Perhaps Mrs. Everard's eyes were sharpened by her own mental experience, but it struck her as significant that the girl's partner was Haines when she chose to remember this graceful duty. Might not another man's time-allowance have been shortened rather than her *fiancé's* in that brief period for talk during the "sitting out"? Haines and she had been downstairs, sitting in the darkest part of the paved ground that served the Club for a garden, and could not plead the excuse of being unable to find some corner to themselves. Yet Barbara seemed quite content to leave this *tête-à-tête* and to sit upon the arm of Lady Stroud's sofa and chat generally to one and another in place of having her lover to herself. Mrs. Everard looked at Rodney Haines with her direct, full gaze and found his radiance undimmed. He still moved in the glamour of his happiness, and his quick smile was ready for the feeblest of jokes with Lady Stroud. Then she turned to the girl whose long, slight body was posed so carelessly on the sofa

arm, and found her looking down, with a non-committal air that promised nothing. The pretty pose of her smooth, young head was almost as if the weight of hair bowed it a little from the neck, and Mrs. Everard kept her fascinated gaze on her till Barbara turned deliberately to her as if drawn by it.

"Mrs. Everard, I want to know if I may come and see you some day—quite by myself, and not formally?" she said. The request suggested an impulsive caprice that should have carried a smile with it; but she did not smile, and her empty blue eyes seemed for the first time as if they were concealing a thought.

"I should like that very much," said Mrs. Everard gently. "If you will tell me when you are coming I will deny myself to other visitors."

Barbara nodded as if the suggestion were what she wished, and then turned to Haines with the same deliberation.

"I wish you would get me some lemonade, Rodney," she said. "I am so thirsty—get it before the next dance, please."

Haines turned quickly, and his face altered even over the trivial service. It seemed such a joy to do anything for her that it was pitiful to Mrs. Everard's understanding eyes. "Shall I bring it to you here?" he said. "You won't have gone off to dance by the time I get back, as you did with the Chief Justice, for instance? Mrs. Everard, Barbara has been sitting in dark corners with your husband!"

"I hope it was a clean corner, then," said Claudia composedly. "Some of the Club chairs are very dusty."

"No—no! I will stay here—do go and get it, there's a good boy!" said Barbara hastily; but the instant he had gone she turned to Claudia again.

"May I come to-morrow morning?" she said almost eagerly.

"Certainly."

And then Mr. Merryn appeared, for it was his dance, and was kept waiting until Miss Playfair had received, and drunk, her lemonade. She went off with him, but turned, her light hand resting on his arm, and said, "Thank you!" to Claudia with that same new gravity.

"Mrs. Everard is looking awfully fit to-night!" remarked Merryn.

"Yes," said Barbara, and there was enthusiasm in her tone. "I think she is the most beautiful person I have ever seen."

He did not answer this, perhaps because he was watching for an opening in the crowded room to swing her into the dancers. He was rather hot already, for he danced as thoroughly as he played polo; but Barbara had no fault to find with the steady rush of their rhythmic young feet over the floor. In silent vigour they danced the waltz through, finding the same enjoyment that a young horse does in the pace of his gallop. When the music stopped they stopped, and Merryn removed his arm from her waist, and she put her hand on it again, as methodically as well-drilled soldiers. To them it was all part of the Game—dancing was a game as much as tennis, and they played it to well-authenticated rules. Being English they accepted the Game and its rules as national standards.

"Jolly good tune," said Merryn.

"Yes, I like that 'It might have been' waltz, it was the best last season," was Barbara's comment; and they went out of the dancing-room humming it in concert cheerfully:

'It - might - have - been -	if-we had-known,
All - our - hearts - told -	us-in the-past;
But-another-came-between	and-then-the-golden-chance-had-flown;
It - might - have - been	it-might have-been!"

They sat down in two chairs outside the dancing-room in a very ugly glare of light; but it could not find a flaw in Barbara's smooth skin, or hardly detect a line round Merryn's clean-shaven lips. The two young, satiny heads were as bright with health as the coat of a thoroughbred in good condition.

"Are you playing polo to-morrow?" said the girl.

"Yes. Is Lady Stroud coming down?"

"I wish she were!"

"Why don't you ask her?"

"I think it bores her going every time."

"It doesn't bore you?"

"Oh no; I love it!"

A pause. Across the passage, not ten feet away, Mrs. Bunney and Major Dalkeith were carrying on the customs of an affair suspected by half Exile, talking in bravado for their world to see, possibly arranging the sordid details of their next illicit meeting. But in the young clear eyes of the couple facing them it mattered not at all. They saw nothing but an uninteresting man and a *passée* woman resting between the dances even as they were doing.

"It's the gymkana next week," said Merryn.
"You must come to that."

"Yes, we shall come to that."

"Will you name a pony for me?"

"Yes, if you like."

"I mean, if Haines doesn't mind?"

"Why should he mind?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Blank silence again, while it is to be supposed that they both pondered as to why Mr. Haines should mind. The conversation could not be said to be witty or particularly elevating; yet Mrs. Everard, meeting them on their return to the dancing-room, thought she had never seen two pairs of such serene blue eyes. There was neither doubt nor disturbance in Barbara's face for the minute; she looked like a careless child again, and the young man with her was smiling—at some stupid joke, no doubt. Then Mr. Haines appeared to claim Miss Playfair once more—he had all the uneven numbers, as the Chief Justice had supposed; but Mrs. Everard turned away.

She left soon afterwards. She had supposed that her husband would stay on, as he sometimes did, and the car return for him. She had told him, briefly, that she was going home, and he had made no comment, and with a sensation of relief that felt to her almost light-headed she went to make her adieux to Lady Stroud. There was no ceremony observed at the weekly Club dances, and it was not unprecedented to leave before the Government House party, who were staying later than usual on Barbara's account.

"Are you going, Mrs. Everard?" said Lady Stroud; and then in confidence, "I wish I were!" she added.

"May I stay and chaperon Miss Playfair for you?" asked Claudia, pausing.

"No—no; my husband will not leave at present," said the Governor's wife, thinking gratefully how kind Mrs. Everard's eyes could be, and—for the fiftieth time—that she was a really nice woman. She wondered also that men called her face cold; it was so very tender and womanly at times, and quick with sympathy. "I am sure it is very good of you to offer," she said. "No one else would have done so!"

"A chaperon has always seemed to me one of the lesser martyrs!" said Claudia, and her irresistible upper lip lifted a little with the suggestion of a smile. "She has the reputation of a dragon soured by draughts!"

"I wish we could do away with the custom and let young people look after themselves!"

"But surely Mr. Haines could look after Barbara now!"

"I suppose he could; but the child coaxed me to stay for a little, to tell the truth," Lady Stroud admitted. "As long as I am here she thinks the Admiral won't look at his watch! He has been rather strict lately in packing her off to bed."

Claudia did not comment; but as she went to the dressing-room for her cloak she comprehended from her own case that Barbara would drive home alone with Mr. Haines unless the Admiral and Lady Stroud remained with her, and the impulse

that was hurrying her home by herself lent her a fatal intuition for Barbara. She wished that there were no fear in her own heart to teach her Barbara's—she wished that she had not known; and yet she did know, and almost dreaded the girl's visit to her on the morrow.

Even as she was entering the car a man came out of the club-house swiftly as if waiting for her and helped her in. With a revulsion of her senses she recognised that it was her husband, and that he must have been skulking in the dark entrance and ready to join her at the opportune moment. She turned quite indifferently as she was taking her seat in the car.

“I am sorry to take you away, Edgar. I thought you would have stayed longer. You need not leave on my account.”

“I am quite ready to come, my dear. I never intended to let you go home alone!”

His solicitude was so unusual as to be a mockery—or a menace. But she leant back in her corner with the same quiescence, and hardly spoke on the way home beyond a few brief comments on Miss Playfair's appearance, and even then with a half-suppressed yawn. He, on the contrary, seemed alert to uneasiness. He fidgeted restlessly and gave the chauffeur impatient orders, and his voice had a vibrative quality that sounded over-excited.

“She's a very jolly girl,” he said of Barbara, with a hint of patronage. “Nothing in her at present, but marriage will alter that. She looks healthy too—sort of girl who could eat an apple with her front teeth. That's a sure test.”

"I think Miss Playfair's mind is as healthy as her body," said Claudia coldly.

He laughed disagreeably. "Her build is more important—a man looks at those long limbs and clear skin, and doesn't worry about her mind."

"I think you wrong Mr. Haines!" said Claudia with biting irony. Had this man beside her always turned the ugly side of his nature to her like this, and shown her the coarseness of his outlook, or had she merely been blind and deaf? Her sharpened senses recoiled now, at any rate.

"Haines is an ass!—always was," said Everard sharply. "Some emaciated blue-stockings would be good enough for him and his fiddle, not that girl with blood in her veins. She told me she thought we were the handsomest couple in Exile! What do you think of that?" He laughed a little satisfied laugh and passed his hand half-fondly over his clean-shaven mouth.

"I think that Miss Playfair shows the judgment of extreme youth!" said Claudia, and it was then that she yawned. She did not wonder at his objection to Haines, Everard's appreciation of people being entirely influenced by their opinion of him. She had always known this, but had thought it the natural vanity of a clever man.

When the car drew up at their own bungalow she went straight through the house and to her own room; but her husband had followed her with more speed than she knew, and his voice at her own door arrested her. It was lowered to a caressing pitch that she failed to recognise across a lapse of seven years, and struck her

grotesquely, as a liberty, though he spoke commonplace words.

"Are you going to bed at once, now, Claudia? Won't you come and have a chat first?"

"Is it anything particular?" she said, hesitating, with a certain cold courtesy. "I am rather tired, and it is past one o'clock."

"Oh! I only wanted a little of your company. You are worth looking at even if you don't talk, you know! By Jove! I never saw you looking better than to-night, Claudia,—I could have found it in my heart to make love to you, in spite of being your husband!" He laughed a little uneasily. "You are looking superb at this moment."

She waited patiently, her hand on her door, for something better worth hearing.

"Come and have some lemonade. I want a drink, too! My throat is as dry as the Rocks. You can spare five minutes. Most women wouldn't need urging!" He laughed consciously. "The little Playfair girl would sit up with me till morning."

"I am going to bed—I am tired," Mrs. Everard repeated in civil explanation. She looked at him a moment in slow wonder at his fatuousness. Did he think to make her *jealous*?

"Well!" He moved nearer to her, his head a little bent to her ear, and she felt rather than saw the narrowed eyes like those of a beast of prey: "That's no reason why you should shut me out! It's a long time since I have worried you, isn't it, Claudia? But I'm your husband, you know—I could if I would!"

The woman's figure stiffened, froze, as if cased

in steel. Her lids drooped over her deep-coloured eyes, and her voice was carefully lowered as she spoke.

"The agreement was mutual!"

"You seemed to prefer it—of course, I could not force you against your inclination! I think I've been patient."

That was the old Everard, turning words to his own account, handling the very facts in her favour until they evidenced against her. She knew that she had her defence, but the horror of the suggested situation froze the words in her throat. She could not think of anything except the one giant reason why the very thought seemed to pollute her. She even forgot his recently admitted infidelities—the Arab house at Banishment, a sufficient argument for any wife. She could think of nothing but Richmond Hervey, and her husband's mere presence near her made her mad.

"It is out of the question," she said, and she had never pronounced words with so much difficulty.

"Come, Claudia, don't be cruel! You don't realise the temptations you have thrust me into by locking me out of your room. I have always left the decision in your hands, but you don't know how hardly you have treated me."

She listened to the facile lies with a kind of terror of him growing on her. It seemed to her that he might persuade Heaven itself of his injuries and her agency in the case, in spite of the bitter truth. She was being driven, and felt that she must end this now or never. With a sudden movement she almost thrust him back from her, and stood with her back

to her bedroom door as if she guarded her very soul there.

"It is impossible—now or ever," she said, speaking slowly. "I must tell you—the price I paid for—the letter!"

"The letter!" Her success was almost more than she had played for. His face went dark red as if flushed by wine, and his eyes lightened in a curious fashion that made them murderous. "*Hervey!*" he said. "Not *Hervey?*"

She merely bowed her head, and there was a long pause. It seemed to her that some minutes passed while they stood there outside her door—she with her back still against it, her hands grasping the handle, he with his shoulders thrust forward and his narrow, working face like a snake going to strike.

"How was it?" he said at last, and his voice was hardly more than a whisper.


"You had told me you must have the letter—to offer anything," she said monotonously. "Those were his terms. He would take nothing else."

"And you—consented?"

"I stayed the night in his house."

He drew away from her, and walked through the drawing-room to the pillars. Across the long vista she could see that the servants had left spirits and soda-water on the dining-room table, and Everard poured out some whisky and drank it off neat. She wondered even at the moment if he needed it, or if this were not half a dramatic excuse for the spirit, to him—for his sufferings as an injured husband could hardly be those of a man who had loved and lived with his wife, or the guarding of his

honour very much to a man who had none. For a minute she stood there still, watching him. Then she saw him turn towards his own room, and with nerveless fingers, her hands still behind her, she opened her bedroom door and slipped in. The turning of the key in the lock seemed to relax the strain, for once more she dropped down in her easy-chair and clasped her hands over her burning eyes. A long, dry sob wrenched its way from the depth of her lungs without her will, and shook her whole body. She had accomplished her own salvation, freed herself of a danger too horrible to contemplate, but the reaction of relief was almost more terrible than the moment of peril. All she knew was that she had defended her body because it was Hervey's, and her soul stood in arms for his service.



CHAPTER XIII

“ Et puis tu viens à moi, et je frissonne,
Tu prends ma main, et tout mon cœur se donne.
A toi en un baiser brûlant d'émoi,
Car tu es à moi ! ”

GUY D'HARDELOT.

THE Rocks had claimed their toll. A young man walking in the sunshine of full day had suddenly become dazed, flung up his arms and staggered, babbling of things that should be locked in decent silence. Some Arabs, coming in with their camels from a desert village, found him clawing helplessly at the lowest stratum of his executioners and took him into Reserve, where they left him at the hospital.

“ The madness of the Rocks is upon him,” they said. “ He has felt their breath.”

“ It is the radiation of the sun's light and heat rays from the surface of the rocks,” said the doctor, translating Arab imagery into English common-sense. “ Not sunstroke exactly, but a kind of light-stroke, one might almost say. It affects the eyes. If I wanted to be laughed at I should say the Rocks exercised a kind of hypnotism on some people.”

He spoke to Rodney Haines, who had met the Arabs at the mouth of the Cutting and directed them

to the hospital. The Colonial Secretary had ridden on himself as soon as possible to inquire for the victim, whom he knew slightly. He was one of the E. T. staff—a nice boy, who sometimes played bridge at the Club.

“Poor Smyth!” he said, and that strained mobile face of his—the face that should have belonged to a cripple—was shadowed by the other man’s tragedy as water reflects light and shade. “I suppose there is nothing to be done for him?”

“Nothing, except to keep him in the dark. If one could wipe the reflection of the Rocks off his brain he’d be well in an hour.”

“Will he recover?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. “He’s young,” he said in a non-committal tone. “I expect he’s been working too hard and out here too long. The E. T. staff are all dead keen on wireless just now and spend too much time up at the installation. The glare’s enough to kill a camel.”

He would give no further opinion, but the disaster haunted Rodney Haines. He was possessed of a quicker sympathy than his fellows, and could realise where they only heard. The Arabs had given their own picturesque version of the finding of Smyth, and the scene was as patent to Haines as if he had been present. It seemed to him pitiful to think of Smyth, upright in the common day one minute and the next struck out of his course, making a zigzag track with mazed eyes, to spit his soul out at the foot of the Rocks. Men usually babbled of their religion, particularly those who had professed

none, or smote the lavaed surface with the palms of their hands. Haines shivered slightly in the sunshine as he rode back to Fort, and thrust his pith helmet over his own eyes.

At the gate of Government House he met Barbara just going down to pay her promised visit to Mrs. Everard, and stopped to tell her the news, so that she carried it with her and Mrs. Everard learned it as soon as Lady Stroud.

"My husband has gone into Reserve," she said, as Barbara settled her long limbs in a rocking-chair and began to swing lazily. "Perhaps he will bring back better news."

"Is the Chief Justice likely to be back soon?" said Barbara. She was secretly hoping that he was not, though she had found him very pleasant at the dance ("jolly" was the word Barbara always used to express a personality that made no great demands on her own); but she did not know that her feeling was easy to read in her transparent face until she saw Mrs. Everard smile.

"I do not think he will be home until this evening—he has business with his clerks," she said quietly.

"Oh, I did not mean——" began Barbara in dismay, and then laughed at herself. "I did hope I should get you to myself and talk to you," she admitted.

"There is no fear of interruption," said Claudia gently.

But the girl did not talk. She sat gazing out through the darkened jalousies for a few minutes with limpid eyes that did not see the slits of the

dazzling outside world between the shutters. Her long hands were linked idly on her knee, for even when mentally disturbed Barbara Playfair was not restless, and on the third finger of the left Mrs. Everard saw a quaint filigree ring—an Arab ring bought in the gold and silver shops of Reserve, and worn as a pledge until the diamonds should arrive from England to take its place.

“Mr. Everard is very handsome,” Barbara said suddenly at last.

“Yes,” Mrs. Everard agreed composedly. The acknowledgment did not touch her new vision of his face. She had decided that Edgar was considered handsome long ago. “But he is rather too thin just now.”

“I suppose you were very much in love with him when you married?”

Claudia waited a moment. It did not matter to herself what she said. So great and wonderful a thing had happened to her of late that her marriage seemed to be very far away—a trivial thing in comparison, that had taken place while life was still immature. But to this girl it might matter very much what she said, and she spoke slowly, as if feeling her way in the dark.

“I do not think I was so very much in love; I was very flattered and content, but a girl cannot have developed the same power of feeling as a man many years her senior. I seem to remember my own feeling as one of great surprise that so clever a man should be satisfied with me as I was then.”

Barbara’s head turned quickly, and her eyes fixed themselves on Claudia’s face.

"But you must always have been beautiful!" she said simply.

"Possibly; but I was very undeveloped, and in some queer way I knew that, and I meant to grow! I think that it is a risk for a man with a very agile brain, like my husband's, to marry a girl without much experience of life."

Those blue eyes, a little wistful, were still fixed on her face, and she found it hard to meet them. Barbara's thoughts seemed to rise in them like visible things, and Mrs. Everard had a frightened feeling that she had only to look to read what was passing in her mind.

"Did you find it very difficult—to be what he wanted, I mean?" said the girl rather breathlessly.

"It is always difficult for a woman to be what a man wants! The most selfish wives often seem the most successful in married life, because they simply go their own way and do not care if their husbands are disappointed."

"I don't think I could do that," said Barbara simply. "I should feel that I was not playing the game. It is so dreadful to take so much and give so little."

"Even if the man is satisfied?"

"They are not satisfied," said the girl, with one of her sudden glimpses of shrewdness. "They are always waiting for more!"

Mrs. Everard was silent in her turn. She had a thing to say and found great difficulty in saying it. But out of her own mighty experience a compelling force drove her into truth however overpowering the

sound of it. Truth is an inspiration and does not come to us every day. Therefore with stammering lips and another tongue it is decreed that we shall speak to this people.

"There is only one thing that really matters," she said baldly, "and that is the touchstone of love. If you have the least spark of love for the man you are marrying it may grow. If your heart is absolutely empty of love for any man, it is possible that it may come for your husband, though that is a risk that can only be justified by results. But if you have the least spark of love for any other man than the one you are marrying, then it is sacrilege of the holy of holies. You cannot know what you are doing, or you would not do it. It is degrading body and soul alike. It is the sin against the Holy Ghost."

She shut her lips on the last words, and there was silence. Then, rather suddenly, Barbara rose to go. She made no conventional excuse about getting back before the heat, as people nearly always do in Exile when in a difficulty, she simply held out her hand.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Everard," she said ; but for what she thanked her Claudia could not tell, because Barbara was not looking at her. Her eyes were lowered once more, and her face was rather pale.

"If you hear any more about Mr. Smyth, will you let me know?" Mrs. Everard said as they parted. The telephone is such a constant source of communication that news is never stationary in Exile.

"Yes, I will, certainly," said Barbara. She hesitated for a second, as if she were going to speak, but she did not, and a little later Claudia heard the motor roll out of the compound and down the hill.

She had the bungalow to herself, and the empty rooms breathed peace and silence save for her own footfall. Though she had not told Barbara so, she knew that Edgar Everard would not return that evening, might not return the next day, though for appearance sake it was probable. He had left a note for her, delivered at breakfast time, in which he said he had business in Reserve and should pass the night there, but she had better keep his absence to herself. That meant that he was going to Hassan's, or possibly some house of worse repute of which she knew nothing; but she recognised that her confession of last night would be the reason he would give for his moral lapse if accused of it, and quite possibly he did wish to go away from her and face this new revelation of her character. She must be out of focus to his mental vision, long used to seeing her as a mere complementary adjunct to himself. She admitted coldly that he had his standpoint and had probably suffered a shock.

But his absence was an indefinite relief, and the new menace of his claim upon her successfully denied made her almost gay. It seemed to her that she had put herself for ever out of his reach by her confession, and, though she regretted it on Hervey's account, she did not think that it could harm him even through the ingenuity of her husband's hate. He could not accuse Hervey of a wrong the price

of which was his own safety. He had demanded the letter at all costs, and had put no limit on the means to its possession.

“ Et quand divinement ta voix m'enchaîne,
Je vois s'évanouir toute ma peine,
Et tout ton être chante, et vibre en moi—”

Claudia sang softly to herself as she moved about the house, and her own voice was rich and happy in her own ears. At midday the Arab butler brought her a chit that had been delivered by hand, and then suddenly the blood rushed to her heart and beat behind her eyes, denying her own impatience for the minute and blinding her eager sight. For it was from Hervey, and she forgot that he had broken their compact in her first recognition of his handwriting.

“ I cannot wait any longer—you are trying me too far,” he wrote, without further beginning. “ You promised to write, to tell me when I might see you. Do you know that it is three days and over since you left me? You told me that you loved me—if you had, you would not have kept me without a word. I do not believe it any more—it was a ruse to get what you bargained for; but it was an unnecessary refinement of cruelty, because I had given my word, and should have kept it anyhow. I know you will be alone to-night—I heard it by chance. I shall be at my house in Reserve. If there was any truth in your protestations, you will find the means of coming out to me waiting in the road below your house to-night. I will send you a guide—but I do not expect you to come. No woman ever gave me so beautiful a gift as you offered—why should you be any different to the rest? Perhaps I ought to thank you for even having invented the lie.

“ RICHMOND.”

The blood had rushed to Claudia's white face as she began to read and then left her as colourless as before. Her eyes grew wet and then full of tender laughter, and her upper lip lifted a little as if it kissed the empty air. Of all fierce love-letters that a woman ever received, surely this was the strangest! Then her face clouded a little as if trouble outweighed happiness. The one thing that was unendurable was that he should doubt her love. She had no means of reassuring him, of communicating with him even, and it seemed long to wait for night. The risk was nothing—even if Everard had returned she would have attempted it now, in the cause of that doubt; but he did not come, and towards evening she grew quieter because her mind was made up and her plans arranged.

Her own room opened on to the verandah, and it was not impossible to slip past the drawing-room and to the steps leading to the compound. The bungalow was raised above the ground to allow for ventilation, and she dared not jump from her own balcony on to the gravel beneath for fear of arousing the Arab staff. As it was she carried her reputation, almost her life, in her hand; but whatever happened he should not doubt her. That was an outrage on her love and its "beautiful gift." He had stated no time, but she was not going out to-night, and at ten o'clock she told the servants to shut up the house and went to her room. Her heart seemed to beat time to the pulse of the world, and the deliberate movements of the Arabs lasted an eternity. At last, when the bungalow was dark, and the sound

even of bare feet had died away, she wrapped herself in a silk shawl—the darkest thing she had—and flung her grey motor veil over her head. She had already opened her jalousies to the verandah, and having put out the light she stepped into the darkness.

Beyond her, all along the residential quarter of Fort, the lights of other bungalows twinkled so brightly that she pressed herself back against the wall aghast. It seemed to her that if she could see them so plainly their owners must see her. Then she remembered that even if discovered by her servants she could say she came out for the cooler air. She had often been on the verandah later than this. She carried her slippers in her hand and walked noiselessly past the drawing-room windows, then on to the steps, and so like a mantled ghost into the compound. It was darker here, there being no lights from the bungalow. She moved by the mud wall, and then remembered that the gate might be locked. It was high and heavy, and to climb over was hazardous, though possible. But the latch gave to her shaking hands, and a minute later she was in the road, safe from observation, since it led nowhere but to their own house.

She had not troubled as yet as to how she should get back, though however late the Arabs locked the gate it would surely be secure at dawn when she must return. But all her heart was set on reaching Hervey, her desire seemed to outrun her feet, and she had no thought for to-morrow before to-night was fulfilled. Not twenty yards down the road

she fell back with a suppressed cry, for in the shadow of the high wall that guarded their own compound rose a tall turbaned figure. He was a camel-driver, and the distorted outline of his camel was dimly visible behind him. She had not thought how she was to reach Reserve—had perhaps looked vaguely for a car ; but in a minute it flashed across her mind that this was the safest disguise, and she made a hesitating movement towards the waiting group. The camel-driver did not hesitate at all. He lifted a long black cloak, the kameese that Arab women wear out of doors, and wrapped it completely over Mrs. Everard, head and all. She drew it quickly across her face, finding the eyelet holes after a minute, and grasping her arm he led her to the camel and assisted her to mount. Then the beast rose with hardly a sound, and swinging round went down the steep incline, his driver leading him by the nose-rope.

It was a big bull riding-camel, and the motion was not rough. Mrs. Everard sat on the native saddle, one foot round the wooden peg, the other resting on the beast's neck, her figure muffled beyond recognition in the black kameese. The progress seemed slow compared to a motor or even a carriage, but the wide shuffling stride carried them over the ground quicker than appeared possible, and from her high position Claudia Everard looked round upon the world as if she had never seen it before. Above her towered the Rocks, pointing jaggedly amongst the stars, and below her lay the dark line of the sea and the ships at anchor. Fort lay behind her, for they were rapidly nearing

the Cutting, and no motor cars passed them, for it was too late for any one to be coming back from Reserve now. All the life of Fort lay higher up on the rocky ledges, where people were motoring in and out the curving roads to each other's bungalows. There was a dinner at the Bunney's to-night, and a meeting of the Debating Society after it. She remembered it with a little still wonder, as at something very far off instead of only a few miles away. And still that swinging stride of the camel carried her on through the flashing darkness, whither her desire went before her. She knew that she should never forget this ride—the mystery of it, the sense of lawlessness, of high adventure. She could have laughed like a girl, and her blood raced through her warm veins.

Once or twice they passed other camels going home to Reserve, ridden or led by Arabs, draped figures on foot hardly discernible in the night for the ragged natives of the day. Her own camel was so much swifter and easier that Claudia seemed to pass them all by as the rider of a thoroughbred passes mere traffic horses. They came out of the cutting on to the broad road leading to Reserve, and below them flared the town, with a far-off mingling of sound going up from its native quarter, the clamour of strange instruments, the chant of voices, and the echo of laughter. Along the road they swung, past the dark prison and the court house, and into the narrow byeways of the city. She had never been to this house of Hervey's, and did not know where it stood, but it was the same to which he had invited

Lady Stroud and Barbara to tea, and in the heart of the streets. The Arab driver called to the passers-by to get out of the way, and they turned and looked at the veiled figure lifted high over their heads, but without much curiosity. High-class Mahomedan ladies go out by night rather than by day, and it was not unusual for them to travel so. Had Claudia appeared in a car, however thickly veiled, her secret might have been suspected; but the great bull camel was a safe convoy.

They turned into a narrow alley-way, instead of stopping at the carved doorway where the Government House party had alighted. As the camel knelt down the reek of the streets came up into Claudia's nostrils, and through and over it all that strange scent of powdered woods and spices that she had smelt in Hassan's house. She had a feeling of a dream, of having come to her lover in just such a manner ages ago, as she entered the door in the wall which opened to the summons of her guide. There was another man inside with a lamp, which he held high to throw the light on a narrow flight of stairs, and without a word having passed Claudia gathered up her draperies round her and climbed up the stairs before him, emerging in a narrow room like a cupboard where she stood still and waited. The silence in which she had journeyed throughout seemed to her as part of the dream, and it was not broken until the man with the lamp opened a door in front of her and said "Al Siyyidha!" which is the term for a lady of high rank rather than the more usual "Al Sitt." Then she stepped from the cupboard-room into the big apartment where Lady

Stroud and Barbara had had tea, and the door closed behind her.

There was light in the large space before her, though that portion of it which was open to the upper air showed only the black velvet of a night sky embroidered with stars. The light came from two old brass lanterns, and was softened from the white glare of electricity to a coloured glow. It shone on a great divan piled with silk cushions, and a mass of potato flower which was growing in some hidden tub or pot. The trails of leaves and blossoms were welcome amongst the tall palms that made a little green oasis near the staircase, and all round the walls hung dull silk curtains instead of wall paper. Draperies were so uncommon in Exile that they made a welcome change. Richmond Hervey was standing on the further side of the room with his back to the door by which Claudia had entered, near a bookcase from which he had taken a volume, and was reading it in a desultory fashion, as if he had not decided whether or no to sit down to it seriously. At the sound of the Arab's announcement he tossed it aside, and turned quickly to the dark veiled figure, standing still where it had entered.

"Claudia!" he said below his breath. "Claudia!"

His voice shook a little, and his hands were not quite steady as he unwound the black kameese and took her silk shawl from her. She stood still, letting the disguising draperies fall from her to the floor, where they lay unheeded. There was an instant's pause, as between the flash of cannon and the reverberation, and then his powerful grasp

almost lifted her into his arms, and he bent her head back with the weight of his kiss. For a full moment her breath was stayed, and when their lips parted she could hardly say "How could you doubt me!"

"I never doubted you!" he answered, and there was a little apologetic laugh in his level eyes. They were usually the coldest thing about him, and now they were the warmest. Claudia's own gaze faltered a little beneath them, and she flushed as generously as a girl.

"But you told me you did not believe it! You said I did not love you!"

"If I hadn't pretended to doubt you, would you have come to me to-night?"

"Oh, Ritchie!"

"I was *obliged* to have you. I knew nothing else would bring you—so I wrote that." He stopped to brush her eyes with his lips, the lids being still lowered. "Was I very rude?"

"Brutal!"

"I'm not a bit sorry—since it answered."

"Perhaps I can make you——"

"No, my beauty! You won't spoil it? I have so little of you, as it is!—and it was three days——" His confidence was altering to anxiety, to dismay, when she lifted her dense lashes and he saw that she was laughing.

"You do deserve to be punished!" she said. "That letter was outrageous. Well, what will you do with me now that you have got me?"

"Love you to death, I think!"

He lifted her gently and carried her to the divan, where he laid her down on the piled cushions and sat

down beside her, his face towards her. "Now we can talk in true Arab fashion," he said. "Do you like my house, Idol?"

"Yes, indeed I do! It is all part of the glad adventure. I should like to wear Eastern silks and have that strange scent in my clothes that Arab women have and live here with you!"

"It is all yours at the word!"

She laughed a little. "It would be like living in the Arabian Nights! I wonder if we should all become more Eastern and less British if we lived in real Arab houses like this? I do think that Government bungalows are unnecessarily hideous. Look at the one they have just built for the Admiral out at Health!"

"It is the mixture of styles that worries you," said Hervey, with ironical gravity. "Of course the lower part is Doric, but I think the upper part is Early Dog-kennel!"

They both laughed, for the structure in question resembled nothing so much as an ugly museum. "What a comfort it is to talk to somebody who can see things!" Claudia said. "If I had criticised the new Government House to any one at Fort they would have reminded me that it cost several thousands to build."

"Some people can never see beyond the pence column. Claudia, what is it that makes us so necessary to each other? I don't know how else to express it, but the want of you used to make me think I hated you, and it was not until I understood that I realised how I had been fighting the strongest thing that ever came into my life."

"I can only explain it by a theory," she answered slowly, as if struggling for the right words. "There is an idea—some scientific men hold it, I believe—that every single soul in the world is only half—that somewhere or other there exists the other half that makes it whole. It may be a great queen whose other half is a monk, or a savage, or some poor criminal working in her own prisons!—but somewhere or other there is, or was, the other soul that makes her complete. Of course, no one in a million ever chances to meet with his other self. The whole world may lie between—death may intervene—a hundred things may happen. But if they do meet by some miracle the desire—no, the necessity, as you say—is so strong between them that nothing on earth will keep them apart except some perversion of their own will. You and I happened to meet—that was all."

"And I was blind!"

"Not really; all that anger in you against me was simply the resentment of your whole nature at being thwarted, I suppose. You would have found out some day—quite possibly after I had gone away. That was what I was afraid of."

He trembled a little, all through his big frame, as if the risk he had run of losing her came home to him suddenly. "I want to feel sure," he said hoarsely. "I want to take you now and leave nothing to chance. This is not a thing to play with."

But a shadow fell on her face. "It might

injure you, Ritchie! I ought to warn you—I had to tell Edgar Everard what I had done.”

She lifted her eyes steadily to his face, not afraid of condemnation, though as if asking for his opinion. But he nodded, unmoved.

“Quite right; I am glad you did so. I hope he understood?”

“Only what I told him.” She was silent a moment, and then her speech grew more hurried. “It was necessary to tell him—it was my own safeguard.”

“What!” He laid his hands on her shoulders and gripped her as if he feared to let go of her for one instant. “He claimed his rights?”

“He has none!” she said, lifting those wine-coloured eyes in quiet reproach. “But I had to make it understood.”

“You must not go back to him—you must not leave me again!” he said, and his voice was not quite under control.

“Oh yes; it is quite safe now. That is why he went into Reserve. I do not think the subject will ever be mentioned between us again.” She moved a little restlessly, as if putting something distasteful away from her. “Let us talk of something else,” she said—“something happy.”

“Then we shall have to go back three days.”

There came a flood of sweetness into her face. “It does seem an age since, doesn’t it?” she said. “And yet I have been very content. It was such a relief to know that you knew.”

“I know better now than I did then,” he said slowly, and she saw that it was true. There was

something gentler and more reverent in him, something more satisfied and less eager to grasp at actual bliss. He sat beside her with her hands in his, but he was so happy in her nearness that he did not even kiss her again. "I've been clearing things up—getting ready for the time when we are together."

"I think I shall be able to go to Europe in a few weeks," she said. "But if it can't be done that way I will simply—go."

"And meet me at the Port?"

"Somewhere."

He sat and looked at her again, with that gaze that made her half shy and sweetly ashamed. "Do you know that I thought you were in love with Haines?" he said, and then drew a deep breath. "If you had been, how it would have altered the world—left it in the dark!"

"Rodney Haines!" she said, and her dreamy eyes came wide open with amazement. "Oh, Ritchie, how could you be so intensely stupid? I told you you were stupid the other night, didn't I! How could I be in love with Rodney Haines?"

"I don't know—now. But you always seemed to like him so much."

"Why, so I do. So do you. He is so pitiful, and he will have to suffer so!"

"He is an artist—and then his music is enough to make any one love him. When he plays——"

"When he plays—I always want to kiss—some one else!" said Claudia, and her mouth curved to an unconscious invitation which he accepted.

"So you think Haines is going to suffer through that girl?" he said while he still leaned over her, his voice a caress that had nothing to do with the subject.

"She does not care for him at all!" said Claudia thoughtfully, outlining with one slight finger the thick growth of the grey hair on his temples. "She is not capable of doing so. If she had been let alone she would have fallen in love with Mr. Merryn in the natural course of things."

"With Merryn!" said Hervey, raising his level eyelids a little and smiling down at her. The smile, like the love in his voice, had nothing to do with the subject. He did not care in the least about the Flag-Lieutenant, but the touch of Claudia's fingers on his temples was giving him acute pleasure. "But I don't think they would ever think of such a thing."

"I said in the natural course of things," said Claudia calmly. "They have never had a chance to think! Mr. Haines, with his intense personality, his eagerness, his intensity, has swept things very much out of their natural course."

He looked at her, still smiling, and drew the cool palms of her hands again against his face. The harsh contact of the clean-shaven skin ran over her nerves like electricity. "How do you know all this, Wisdom?" he said.

"The girl came and talked to me—more than she knew. Her trouble is making her almost expressive. Before that she was a fine, empty thing. Love is a great education, Richmond; even to come near it, when you don't share it, is something."

"Yes," he said gravely. "It is impossible to be unconscious in the presence of a god, though you do not worship and depart unblessed."

And then they were both very silent for a minute, and the night went solemnly across the heavens with all its stars in procession.

"Are you tired?" Hervey said at last. "You had a long ride here, and it is late."

"A little. But this divan is very restful. And—I thought—I should have to go back soon!"

"Not yet—not for some hours. Would you like to come up on to the roof and look at the city?"

He put his arm round her and led her up the stairs to the women's quarters, where Barbara had protested against the lack of liberty. They were safe from prying eyes under the high coping of the roof, but through the narrow slits in the masonry Claudia could see far more than had seemed possible of the packed white buildings and the gulfs of streets running through them. Hervey's house was higher than those near it, and the uneven angles and elevations of the roofs around made Reserve a city touched with magic, a phantom jumble designed by genii. There was no moon as yet, but it was quite visible by starlight.

" ' And at night we'd find a town,
Flat-roofed, by a star-strewn sea ! "

she quoted,

" Where the pirate hordes come down
To a long-forgotten quay ' "—

He laughed, and took up the quotation.

“ ‘ And we’d meet them in the gloaming,
Tarry pig-tails, back from roaming,
With a pot of pirate ginger for the likes of her
and me ! ’ ”

“ Do you like ginger ? ”

“ Of course, if it’s pirate ginger ! Was there ever a more Eastern description ? ‘ We could smell the mules and musk ! ’ I am so glad you know Chalmers.”

“ I read a good deal. I have often read myself to sleep up here, when there’s a moon.”

“ Do you always sleep here ? ”

“ Always, when I am in Reserve. The dawn wakes me.”

She threw her head back with a long sigh of pleasure, to look up into the sky and see Orion, belted with stars, the drawn sword in his hand. Of all the constellations she loved him best, and it seemed as if the angel with the flaming sword kept watch above her.

“ He has unlocked the gates of Paradise again,” she said dreamily. “ Richmond, I can think of nothing more beautiful than to have the free sky over my head and the stars to shine on me till morning—with you.” She felt his hand clasping her own, and the growing union between them that needed less of touch and yet was divinely closer.

The streets had fallen upon quiet. All the busy life of the city seemed to have died down with its flare of lights, and in that sleeping mass of packed

humanity there were none more quiescent than themselves. The night went solemnly across the heavens, with all its stars in procession.

* * * * *

In the dawn she rode back to Fort, the forward swing of the camel seeming too hasty now in carrying her away from great content. The soundless tread of the great beast's spreading feet and the stride of the barefoot driver gave her the same dreamlike impression of a dream moving in a dream through the half-tones of the early day. The Arab is not an early riser in Reserve, or if he is he keeps within his silent house, for the mud-caked streets were empty save for the few natives coming into the town, who looked with indifference at her as some Mahomedan lady starting on a journey into the desert. Beneath the kameese she sat in tranquil silence, her grave, long-lashed eyes on the broad road and the Rocks, which were stabbing the colourless sky with colourless outlines. When they emerged from the Cutting the first faint light from the coming sun was quickening the east, but she would be home before he rose. She had not thought as to how she was to get into the compound again, but as they reached the gate the Arab driver stopped his camel close beside it, and she found that without his kneeling down she could step from the saddle on to the broad topmost bar with perfect ease, and to descend on the other side was easy.

"That is Na-sib!" said the Arab under his breath, with his race's belief in luck or Providence.

He took the black kameese from her as she reached

the ground, flung it on to the camel, and disappeared with the same swift noiselessness.

Claudia walked quietly up the steps to the closed door, without haste or uneasiness, stepped aside on to the verandah, and made her way along it to her own room. The jalousies were unlatched as she had left them ; she slipped out of her clothes and into bed, and when the *ayah* came to call her some hours later she was sleeping sweetly.

CHAPTER XIV

“ Not unto us, O Lord ;
Nay, Lord, but unto her be all things given—
May life and light and earth and sky be blasted—
But let not all that wealth of love be wasted.
Let Hell afford
The pavement of her Heaven ! ”

HENRY CUST.

It happened that the next morning was the one on which Mrs. Everard had a lesson in Arabic. Her teacher arrived about ten o'clock, and they sat in the hard, clean drawing-room with the electric fans going, pouring over their Arabic grammar, or in limited conversation about “ Kaleel wa Dineah ” (the “ Arabian Nights ”). Said was a young man, with the most beautiful type of Arab face, beardless as yet, deep coloured, and grave with the gravity of his race. He smiled seldom, but when he did so it was so winning that it made Mrs. Everard greedy to see it again. She lay in wait for it throughout the lesson, tempting him with her poor Arabic, or inquiring for his family. He was a Bedouin and married to one wife already, though he looked barely twenty. Mrs. Everard was a diligent pupil, but she left the problems of Nahwooh, and turned from “ Ism kana ” and “ naib Alfael ” to beguile him into local interests.

“ Is your house finished yet, Said ? ”

“ Not yet, ya Sitt. But in a few weeks it will be ready.”

“ And where are you living now ? ”

“ With my family. There are many houses in the village.”

“ I must come and see your village some day, Said. Is it far ? ”

The Arab looked pleased. He had a deep admiration for the beautiful wife of the Chief Justice, though he hated the latter with all the fearlessness of his race and for reasons which Claudia did not even suspect. Everard's excesses in Banishment were inevitably known to the tribes as far as Health and out beyond into the real country of Arabia. He was “ ibn kelb ” (the son of a dog), and infinitely degraded from the Bedouins' point of view, since he not only stole his neighbour's wife—if he could get her—but drank and took cocaine. Said knew far more of the private life of Claudia's legal husband than any white man in Exile, where it was only the outline of a scandal, and it concerned him that Sitt Indahu Everard should remain in the possession of such a one. Had it been his own sister or cousin he would have made her quarrel his own, though an Arab wife is so much the property of her husband that she has hardly any wrongs ; but Said was sufficiently educated to know that the position of a European lady makes such scandals as Everard's a gross insult to her.

He answered Claudia's inquiry by stating that his village was some two miles from Golgotha, where Hervey Sahib had his house.

“ If ya Sitt would tell me the day on which she

would be pleased to visit us I would bring my jamel for her and show her the way."

"But if I ride the jamal (camel) Said, you must go on foot, and it will be a long walk for you over the sand!" said Claudia kindly. Her heart had leapt in her side at the mention of Hervey's bungalow, for she saw an opportunity for a meeting with him after the expedition. She could order a gharry to drive out to Golgotha, and, leaving Said and his camel there, stop at the bungalow on her way home.

"It is not too far, and the jamal is a young one, so that I must lead him," said Said, and one of his rare smiles made his face beautiful exceedingly. "Ya Sitt would be frightened if he started to jump and play!"

"I should not only be frightened—I should fall off!" said Claudia laughing. "I have seen a 'bucking' jamal (she used the English word). But I am very fond of jamal-riding, Said, and I shall like to come. Would next Saturday suit you?"

Saturday would suit Said very well, and the matter was arranged. They had talked in Arabic throughout, and Claudia had spoken fairly fluently. The lesson was now over, and the young teacher made his farewell, moving with the grace of a free people, and neither awkward nor subservient in his obeisance. Said was a teacher in one of the Government schools in Reserve, and spoke English with more ease than Claudia did Arabic; but his home was out in the desert, and he rode out there on certain days in the week.

As he departed he met a visitor coming in, who turned sharply and stared at him with a lack of manners that Said associated with white men. He disliked the Crown Prosecutor nearly as much as the Chief Justice, and found him hideous into the bargain. Murgatroyd's ungainly body and livid face, with its cavernous eyes, seemed to the young Arab those of a person accurst by God. Indeed, he shuddered, and made a sign to avert the evil eye as they passed each other.

Mr. Murgatroyd was fortunate in finding Mrs. Everard willing to receive him, for at this hour she usually denied herself to visitors. But she had hardly risen, and was still fingering the lesson books when he was ushered in.

"Good-morning, Stanley!" she said quietly. "Edgar is still in Reserve; he went over yesterday—about the Haroun Ali case, I think. Have you come to luncheon?"

"No, thanks! I know Edgar is in Reserve—I met Hassan." He spoke jerkily, with more than his usual awkwardness, which she attributed to that strangeness of a few days since and his betrayal of himself, or, even more probable, to his difference with Everard on her account.

"Who was that young man who was leaving the house as I came?" he said suddenly. His long fingers had seized and were crumpling the pages of one of her text-books, and she noticed the signs of agitation with wonder.

"A young man!" she repeated slowly. "I don't know.—I have seen no one, I think, except yourself this morning?"

"Well—he was an Arab ; but he was coming out of your front door for all the world like a white man ! "

"Oh !" (She almost laughed at the race distinction, though it was common in Exile). "That was Said, my Arabic teacher. He is in the Government schools, and I cannot treat him quite like the servants."

"He is no better !" he said brutally. She glanced at his twitching face, and thought she liked him least when the bullying side of his nature was uppermost. She had heard his views on the natives before, and always suspected them as gathered from Everard. "Arabs are all of a piece," he said.

"What, Hassan ? Jacobs ? " she asked with faint sarcasm, naming the two most powerful of the merchants in whose grip this man as well as her husband might be supposed to be. "I could hardly ask Hassan to go out through the servants' quarters, if he came to see Edgar ! "

He writhed a little, visibly, as if her irony were a whipcord she hardly knew that she wielded, but he did not pursue the subject, though some connection with it might be in his mind unknown to her. For what he said was, "I could not sleep last night—this arguing with Edgar—I am useless against him ! "

"I know," she answered with her old gentleness. "I am so sorry—I am afraid I was the cause." Her wonderful eyes dwelt on him pitifully, unconscious of their own tawny velvet. But the spell of them seemed to hypnotise him again, for he stammered as he tried to speak.

"Couldn't sleep—up all night—went for a walk—along the Reserve road——"

Her breath seemed suddenly to stop, and her heart flashed a message of danger to her brain. "*Up all night*" and "*On the Reserve road!*" What had he seen? What had he thought? Then her forces marshalled themselves to defend Hervey whatever happened to her, and her calm was quite unbroken as she spoke.

"Poor Stanley!—You ought to see a doctor if it goes on. Insomnia is the beginning of the end out here."

"I was down on the road—down there," he went on, unheeding her, and pointing to the windows fronting on the burning world. "And I saw an Arab, with a camel carrying a woman—come up here."

"Up here!" said Claudia in a slow puzzled tone. "Are you sure? What time was it?"

"Just at dawn. They passed me on the road."

"And did you see them come back? For there is no outlet this way."

"No," he said, and his eyes fell. "I went on up to the Garrison—I did not want to spy!"

There was silence for a moment, while she drew her breath. If what he said were true, he had not seen the Arab return without her. But the suspicion, anyway, must be dealt with.

"Well, if they *did* come here, I can only suppose one of two things—either it was some Arab from the desert who had missed his road and discovered his mistake, or else he came to see someone in the

household. One never knows what one's servants are doing, of course, but if I inquire they will only tell me lies."

Her steady eyes were looking straight at him, compelling his stealthy glances that could not meet them fairly. Poor wretch! he had never been much more than a pale reflection of her husband, and now that that support was removed he seemed all abroad, floundering helplessly to stand on his own feet in a new position. She pitied him intensely as she watched the emaciated hands playing with her lesson-books, for in the warmth of her happy love her nature was expanding and ripening. She found herself capable of an infinite charity, where of old she would have been cold and impatient.

"What did you think the Arab was coming here for?" she said. "What did you think yourself?"

He put his hand to his head, in a helpless, bewildered fashion like a child might do. "I don't know—I was afraid"—he began. Then, "Do you think it could have been the same man?"

"The same man!" she echoed blankly. "What man?"

"That boy—that teacher who has just gone," he said hastily, as if bitterly ashamed and yet obliged to speak. "It occurred to me as I came in. He gives you lessons—he is young, and handsome in the Arab fashion. He might have known that Edgar was away ——"

"Said!" she exclaimed, her breath almost taken away by the outrageous suggestion. "Said seeking

to get into my house at night—or in the dawn ! Oh no—no ! He is a strict Mahomedan, and newly married. You do not know the better type of Arab. Stanley, I think Said would *kill* you if he could ever dream what you thought of him !”

His eyes fell again from their wild glance at her. “ It is very natural ! ” he said in a low voice. “ You never see yourself—you do not seem to think of your own power as other women do.” He gave a long sigh, and an uneasy silence fell between them. Then he turned from her as abruptly as he had begun the interview. “ Well, I thought it right to tell you,” he said. “ I’ll go now ; you want rest after your lesson.”

“ Wait a moment, Stanley,” she roused herself to say. “ Even if you won’t lunch I want to speak to you. I have something to ask you.”

He sat down heavily in the chair she indicated and leaned his elbow on the table, making a pent-house of his hands over his miserable eyes. From that screen he could look his fill at her without appearing to do so.

“ Since Edgar first spoke to me—about his plans, and—and the letter,” she said thoughtfully, “ I have had time to think a little, and to take in what he said, as I did not do at once. This Lestoc case, Stanley—it went against the man, of course, and ruined him financially ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders doggedly. “ He got in Edgar’s way ! ” he reminded her, as one to whom he need no longer wear a mask.

She did not flinch. “ Yes,” she said patiently. “ But he had nothing besides his business, had he ? ”

No private means? I think I heard once that he was a prosperous man, but everything depended on his trade."

"I daresay."

"Of course, no one could discuss it with me, and so I never heard. But his wife and children—I did not know Mrs. Lestoc, but I have seen her in Reserve. I am sure there were children."

"I daresay!"

"And what became of them all those months he was in prison? And afterwards, when he went to hospital? And—now, that he is dead!"

"I believe—there was some money at first. And lately—there has been a subscription."

A sudden memory flooded Mrs. Everard's mind. "Mrs. Vanburen and her subscription list!" she said below her breath. "And I never took it in!" She remembered the date of that call, and Mrs. Vanburen asking her to subscribe. It was just before she drove out to Hervey's bungalow for the fateful interview. She had mentioned it to him. No wonder that she had not grasped the object of the charity.

"It seems to me that I am in some sort responsible," she said quietly, "as Edgar is not. At least I feel it so. Will you find out for me exactly how Mrs. Lestoc is left, Stanley?"

He glanced at her with those craven eyes, attracted almost to awe. "Edgar will not approve," he said quickly. "He will be angry. Particularly if it is known that you are doing anything. Have you taken that into calculation?"

"I am not taking that into calculation!"

The light caught her golden hair and seemed to make radiant its dull coils. He blinked at it as if dazzled. "Very well," he said; "I will find out for you."

"And this case of Azeopardi," she went on relentlessly. "I understand from Edgar that these people also—stand in his way?"

"Yes."

"And they will have to go?"

"Yes."

"Except for that they are offenceless? They are honest traders?"

Again he shrugged his shoulders. "As traders go! They are none of them purists."

She seemed to meditate for a minute; for her bowed lips closed one on the other, the irresistible curve of the upper intensified. At last: "I think I will speak to Edgar about this," she said simply.

There was that in the brief sentence that left him stunned. His own daring in opposing Edgar had seemed to him great; but he had been driven by the all-sufficing cause of this woman before him. In that his love had ennobled him to battle, above fear, and without the thought of failure. Her champion could not fail. But he had never gone so far as to question the Chief Justice in his ruthless march upon other men's rights—never questioned his use of the weapon of office in his hands. Now he felt that Claudia was going to do both, and the very idea appalled him. He could not even put the thought into words, and rose a little dizzily to take this new problem into the outer world.

"Good-bye!" he said baldly, not even offering

her his hand. "If I can serve you—in any way—you know——." He faltered and stopped. His new feeling was too strong for him; it left him incoherent.

"Yes, I know," she said gently. "Good-bye, Stanley!"

CHAPTER XV

" Indeed I know you thought you loved me, sweet ;
You pitied me, and loved my love of you ;
In all I said you heard my heart's swift beat.
' This heart that loves me so is warm and true,
A flower to wear, not trample 'neath my feet.'
Thus to yourself you thought that dear, dead day,
We sitting in the twilight still and grey,
Your hands in mine. When hands of lovers meet,
Not long, oh Love, before the lips meet, too."

PHILLIP BOURKE MARSTON.

THE early morning in Exile is the best time for photography, unless one goes out an hour before sunset. At midday the light is too rapid, and the shadows have retreated, so that even the Rocks look flat as paper and their tortured sides but slightly grooved. Miss Playfair used to carry her kodak regularly in her early walks with Mr. Haines, which were now orthodox and unquestioned. Later in the morning, when the Colonial Secretary was absorbed in his duties, she would sometimes develop them herself, for otherwise they must wait until someone was going into Reserve, where there was a photographer. He was a Japanese, and did a thriving trade between the idleness of the garrison and the vanity of the richer Arabs ; but Miss Playfair infinitely preferred to risk her films herself to waiting till it should please Shushi to develop

them for her, and she had the argument on her side that it is ill to keep films on the spool in Exile. The Admiral had contrived a dark room for her at Government House—a mud-walled erection roofed with thatch after the fashion of Arab villages, which filled Lady Stroud's soul with the fear of fire. She had a secret vision of Barbara absorbed in her pyro and bromide and slowly cooked to death, or of Mr. Haines rushing in to rescue her and their common demesne in a kind of holocaust; but the Admiral was far more concerned with the vivid light that would filter in through every breathing space and the necessary ventilation and red lights. There was sufficiency of water, though it was precious, for Hervey's pipes did not extend to the dark room; but the young sutt was popular, and the Arabs carried many pails for her to "wash her pictures."

The films once developed they dried quickly, and then it was necessary to print them to see if they came out creditably. Again, Shushi took too long, and Barbara preferred to use her own frames even if she took the proofs to him to be toned and fixed, for by that time she had generally wearied of her labour. There was only one place where the films would print slowly enough to avoid a sudden rush of blackness that seemed to envelop the picture even while one looked at it, and that was in the little room or office where the Flag-Lieutenant and Mr. Smyth, the secretary, conducted their clerical duties. Mr. Smyth, however, was frequently at work in the more important office at the dockyard, and Mr. Merryn had sole possession of the one at Government House, to which he had a bedroom

attached, both rooms being built on, like an after-thought, to the main bungalow. He had also a flat roof, where he preferred to sleep and was most enviably fanned by the cool night wind that came off the sea; and so it came to pass that he used his legitimate bedroom as a smoking-room, and at first he used to retire there precipitately if Miss Playfair wanted to stand her frames up in the office window, until the young lady showed signs of visible resentment at this vanishment.

"Of course, if I am interrupting your work, I will wait until you are out!" she said one day, standing in the open doorway of the office. Behind her the shadeless courtyard made an aching background so that her white figure looked black, and only the edges of her hair were burnt in gold. "I only want to put the frames in the window; it won't take a minute. And Uncle Jonathan told me to print them here! He says it's the only place."

The Flag-Lieutenant had risen precipitately, and advanced to meet her with the instinct to perform some service that was part of his duties. (Mrs. Bunney always called it "A.D.C.-ing.")

"Oh, of course!" he said hastily. "Do come in, Miss Playfair! May I put the frames up for you? Won't you sit down while they print?"

"I don't want to interrupt you!"

"Please don't mind me; I want to find a list for the dinner party next week that Lady Stroud gave me. It's in my room."

Barbara looked at him with the limpid directness of a child. "I am driving you away! I won't print photographs here any more!" she said simply.

He flushed up to the short, curling hair, for all his tan. He was something of a schoolboy, this big young man with all the amazing knowledge of the Navy crammed into his good-looking head, and she embarrassed him. He knew, for a reason that she did not, that he ought to go into his bedroom and hunt for mythical lists of dinner guests, but before those child's eyes he was helpless.

"But you must stay to see that the films do not over-print!" he said as simply as she.

"Very well, then; don't go away!" said Barbara. "You make me feel a perfect nuisance when you do."

So again it came to pass that he stayed, and reached up for the frames for her to open them and see how the films were printing and then put them back again. Merryn had beautiful hands for a man, large and shapely, and he did not freckle as so many fair men did in Exile. As they stood side by side bending over the frames they were as unsmiling and matter-of-fact as two children, and their conversation left nothing to be desired.

"I'm afraid that one's over-exposed. It's too dense to print properly."

"It was the light over the sea. I never can manage it properly."

"It is very difficult to photograph in Exile at all."

"And yet it seems as if it ought to be so easy."

A pause, while another film was inspected and pronounced "done," the two bright young heads almost touching—the two pairs of hands quite touching over their task, but never losing their steadiness.

"Have you ever tried a stand camera?"

"No; it is so cumbersome to carry."

"It is, rather. But one gets some good results."

"Plates are better than films, too, in a hot climate."

"Yes.—I think that's the last. Can I do anything more for you?"

"No, thanks."

After which Miss Playfair would carry off her films, and Mr. Merryn return to his duties. He generally spoilt a good many pens between her departure and the luncheon gong. Perhaps it was unfair to interrupt him, after all.

On the day that she called on Mrs. Everard in the morning she did not, of course, come to print photographs. But that afternoon she was at polo with Lady Stroud, and the following day she had some pictures of the game that were rather successful.

"Look! that's Mr. Yarrow scoring," she said, holding the films up to the light. "Haven't they come out well? And I only used the fiftieth part of a second."

"It must be a slower game than it looks," said Merryn, with due gravity for the important fact. "By Jove! Shushi never attempted anything like this. He said it was impossible to photograph polo." He stood a trifle behind her as she held the films up to the light, his shoulder brushing hers. And now for the first time both of them seemed conscious that there was something wrong. Merryn moved to the window, altering the opening a little. The office was the only part of the Government

bungalow that had real windows instead of jalousies and a verandah outside which mitigated the light and made it possible to print. Barbara took her frames to the darkest side of the room, and with her back to the light began to put in the films and printing papers. Then she stood them up in the window, and sat down for a minute while they printed. Merryn was less employed and more at a disadvantage. He shuffled the papers on his writing-table, and wondered where the Colonial Secretary was, and what he was doing, at this particular, desperate moment. Also it occurred to him that he would like to go home, or to be appointed to another ship. He did not think the position of flag-lieutenant was good enough.

"I've got you in that second chukker," said Barbara. "It's very good. I'll give you some copies if you like."

"Oh, thanks! I will send one to my sister," said Merryn. It is possible that he remembered how one usually figures in amateur photography, and selected his sister as a harmless recipient; but the suggestion met with Barbara's entire approval.

"Yes, do!" she said; and then a little shyly, "I didn't know you had a sister!"

"She is older than I am."

"Is she married?"

"Yes—soldier-man. She's a good sport."

"Oh, she would be—*your* sister, I mean." That was unconscious flattery. "I can shoot a little—with a twenty-bore. I'm better at that than—music!" said Barbara below her breath. She must

have felt her own shortcomings keenly, for she was rather white.

"I'll see if your pictures are done," said Merryn, and swung round to the window.

He gave them into her hands, but did not now look over her shoulder. She handed the prints to him one after another, and he expressed approval, even of that in which he figured. And indeed, though only a snapshot, it was excellent—the turn of the young active figure, the tiny glimpse of a face, too small to be grimaced and yet suggestive of him.

"I suppose I ought to give you the film—one generally does if one takes people unawares," said Barbara breathlessly. "But I should like to keep it, if I may!"

"Oh, of course; it's awfully good—never saw a better of that backhander on the near side," said Merryn stoutly. "It's a topping game, isn't it!"

"Topping. I wish I could play."

"You're fond of games?"

"I think they're the only things worth doing except sport," said Barbara candidly. "I daresay I shall like muddling round drawing-rooms later on; but at present—well, I'd rather look on at a game than stay indoors!"

His eyes met hers by mistake and kindled. He really had not meant to look at her, or to sympathise, but when your own point of view comes out of the mouth of the girl you—a girl like Barbara Playfair, human nature is sometimes too quick for training.

"Yes, I know," he said. "And then one learns a lot by watching. Haven't you noticed that?"

She looked at him again with her empty blue eyes, and her lips were parted.

"How well you understand me!" she said suddenly. It was pathetic, because most people would have said that there was little to understand. But even her transparency had been mistaken for depth, and she had suffered in striving to be what she was not.

Perhaps he realised the pathos in a sort of mad rage that he must not help her. Perhaps at the moment the discovery of their mutual attraction was the only thing that existed in their universe. They had drawn closer together in their examination of the photographs, and before either realised it the two smooth young faces had met. Then Barbara flung herself down at the table again, burying her head in her outstretched arms, and Merryn had drawn back almost as if stunned. There was no sound in the little office but the girl's sobbing.

"You mustn't do that—please!" he said at last, almost roughly, laying his hand on her shoulder. "My fault entirely—apologise—impulse——"

She raised her head, but turned away her tear-stained face, her shoulders still heaving. "We both did it!" she said with her inartistic honesty. "It wasn't you more than me. But—what I feel is—it's not playing the game!"

Dreadful thought! A spoilt future or the muddle of three lives would be better than this lost ideal. His face expressed the concern he felt.

"I know," he said. "I won't offend again—on my honour!"

"I know you won't," said Barbara simply. "We're on our guard now. But please don't—don't avoid me. I should feel so bad!"

She did not stretch a hand to him, but he came and stood by her side, very manly and very British and very unromantic in his concern. "I meant to go home—to get out of it somehow," he said. "But I'll do anything you like—dear!"

"I'm going in a few weeks," she said in a small and woe-begone voice. "My — engagement has changed our plans." She gulped over the word, but swallowed it bravely.

"All right; I'll see it out. Don't bother," he said. He looked down on the bright, smooth head for a minute as a man might look his last, and he would have been less than a man if his arms had not felt very empty. But it never occurred to either of them that they were unreasonable martyrs in their moral attitude. It was their creed to play the game, and this was their idea of playing it.

Merryn turned away, and collecting the photos put them carefully into the black envelopes and laid them on the table beside her. Barbara gathered them up, and without any further farewell walked blindly into the glare of the courtyard and back to the main portion of the bungalow.

She was not present at luncheon, pleading a headache, and as Mr. Haines was not present either she was advised to lie down. People very frequently get headache in Exile from the glare, and it is a real ailment and not the convenience of excuse.

Merryn was not more silent than usual, and the Admiral had Major Dalkeith to talk to, as he had fortunately been invited. At tea Miss Playfair appeared much as usual, her eyes a little heavy perhaps, but as frankly indifferent to criticism.

"Yes, I know I look as if I had been crying," she said composedly. "I thought myself how unbecoming it was!"

Rodney Haines had come up to Government House in time for tea and to take the ladies down to the Club afterwards. He looked at his *fiancée* with his strained gaze a little comprehensively; but he was the first to laugh—that spontaneous, rare laugh that made him younger than Barbara herself, or than Merryn, standing in attendance by the tea-table as usual.

"Isn't that like a girl!" said Haines delightedly. "She has probably had a shave of sunstroke, and she is very annoyed because it is unbecoming! Babs, I shall forbid your venturing out of the house between breakfast and tea-time." He went closer to her and dropped his jesting tone, the pupils of his eyes a little distended as if with unacknowledged fear. "You are not really ill, my darling? Is your head still aching?"

"No, not now." The girl moved restlessly under his gaze, but did not blush. "I felt very seedy about midday."

"What had you been doing?"

"Nothing particular. Oh, I did go across to the office to print some photos about twelve o'clock," she said bravely.

"Too late for you to be out in the sun; but it's

only a step across the courtyard ! ” His common-sense followed his anxiety, and seemed to puzzle him. Barbara felt the double strain of her own misery and his fatal intuition, and grew impatient in her youth.

“ Never mind—please don’t fuss over me, now or ever ! ” she said irritably. “ I should simply hate it. I’m all right. Get me some tea.”

She flung herself down in a corner of the sofa from which Lady Stroud was dispensing tea, and tried to keep her eyes from straying to the tall white figure beside her aunt. Merryn was leaning his hand against one of the pillars that supported the bungalow, and the whole weight of his body appeared to be thrown on to it, to judge from the position of his fingers. It had made the finger-nails quite white, and Barbara’s keen eyes had caught the inner meaning of that fierce pressure, and understood it and sickened to understand. If it were to be always like this either he or she must go home after all—at once. They were both brave enough to play the game, but she could not bear it dragged out day by day. She had not known what it was like to care like this—she had endured Haines’ love-making with a certain shy pride, half-ignorance and half-reluctance. But since her lips had met those of the man she could love, such licence allowed to any other was a physical nausea. A kiss may be an education in the emotions, or it may be a passive thing, colourless and unimportant. But it is, after all, a sense of touch, and a symbol of a much greater intimacy. . . . Suddenly Barbara blanched and saw her doom before her.

"I'm afraid we ought to ask the Everards to dinner," Lady Stroud was saying thoughtfully. "Of course, I don't mean that exactly, because I am always glad to see *her*; but we haven't had them since he was back, and he is such a difficult man to entertain—people dislike him so!"

"H'm, yes!" said the Admiral. "They'll dislike him more too, after the court begins to sit! I hear the case is sure to go against Azeopardi."

"And that dreadful murder trial!" said Lady Stroud. "If he lets the man off I am sure there will be a rising."

"Tut, tut! Fanny—you are not even to think of such things under my administration, far less say them!"

"Oh, well, this is only a family party! But who can I ask to meet the Chief Justice? There is no one who likes him, except Mr. Murgatroyd."

"Well, that would make eight with ourselves, even if we leave Haines out."

"Two ladies short!" sighed Lady Stroud. "Mr. Merryn, do think of two kind, charitable ladies!"

Merryn started slightly, and put his cup down on the little table; but he went back to his former attitude the next moment, his hand on the pillar as if he liked its support.

"We could ask Mrs. Cateret and Mrs. Smart, as their husbands are shooting in Somaliland," he suggested with an effort.

"But they are not kind or charitable at all. Mrs. Cateret makes the most horrible faces when she tries

to be amusing, and Mrs. Smart turned her back on the American consul the last time she was here. She was really quite rude. They are both such disagreeable women ! ”

“ Perhaps that is why their husbands are in Somaliland ! ” said the Admiral amicably. “ For goodness’ sake let us work off all the unpleasant people together, Fanny, and give up our minds to it for one evening ! ”

“ That’s all very well for you, because the one nice woman falls to your share—Mrs. Everard ! ” said Lady Stroud, laughing. “ How wonderfully well she is looking ! I passed her on the road to the Club yesterday and she struck me afresh. I had to point her out to Mr. Merryn as if he had never seen her before ! ”

“ She is looking wonderfully well,” Merryn agreed.

Mr. Haines had brought Barbara her tea, and sat down quietly near her while she drank it. He was not watching her, and yet she was painfully conscious of a new line between his brows and some shadow on him as if reflected from her own pain. She struggled against the feeling, but it was a relief when tea was over, and a move was made for the Club. Barbara said the air would do her good—she did not want to be left behind ; and then in a panic fear wondered if it sounded as though she did not want to be left with her *fiancé*. Mr. Merryn made his excuses, as Lady Stroud had a sufficient escort in the Admiral and Mr. Haines. He wanted to have a swim, and would go out to Fort Bay, leaving the bungalow before the rest of the party.

Lady Stroud and Barbara went to dress, and the Admiral and the Colonial Secretary stood in the compound, smoking, until the ladies were ready. From his position near the open door in the lattice Rodney Haines could see the empty drawing-room, and his eyes mechanically waited, as they always did, for Barbara's coming. The compound was a place of memories to him, and a little thrill like electricity always went through him at the memory of that night when he asked her to be his wife and first held her in his arms.

Suddenly he saw her, coming quietly across the drawing-room. Lady Stroud was not with her, and for the moment he did not realise that she had not seen them in the compound. The Admiral, indeed, had his broad back to her, but Haines was facing the room. He saw her come back to the deserted tea-table, hesitate, and then move to the pillar against which Merryn had been leaning. The girl turned her head quickly, and pressed her lips to the spot where his hand had rested so long.

It was a foolish action, and an impulse that Barbara's own conscience did not approve, for the next instant she had turned away. But being only a girl, and not a Stoic, the unconscious yearning of the sentiment was instinctive. It flashed across Haines' eyeballs like a flame of fire—the movement and the significance of it. He had felt the presage of despair with all the finest chords of his soul, though he had not guessed—he had not guessed! Now the meaning of the past weeks came back to him—the days during which he had waited with

such perfect hope for the dawn of comprehension in her, the clinging of his own heart to the possibility of her loving him as he so passionately desired. And all the while she had been learning to love Merryn! He did not hesitate or deny his own disaster; he was too quick-witted and intuitive to make another mistake. The facts were all there, clear and hard before his immediate consciousness as if a god had dealt them to him, like blows.

He went on talking to the Admiral—he never knew how—and presently Barbara joined them with Lady Stroud, and they all went down to the Club. Haines was very gay. He talked nonsense and made Lady Stroud laugh, so that even her maternal instinct did not warn her for him. But when they reached their destination he excused himself from bridge, and asked Barbara to come and sit near the low wall, by the water. He had a feeling that what was to be done must be done quickly. It was too dreadful a thing to hesitate over—like some ghastly operation that must be done now if at all. He leaned forward in the dusk and touched her left hand lying listlessly on her knee. Behind her the sunset was working the old miracle over Banishment, the bronze icebergs piercing the bleeding wounds of the western sky. The reflected light lay far across the water, and touched Haines' face to a strange glow, as of some poor martyr waiting for the growing fire. He was rather serious, she thought, and there was a curious transparency under his eyes.

“Barbara,” he said, “I have made a mistake!”

His hand touching hers drew the little loose Arabic ring off her third finger before she could move. Other people in the Club saw only that Mr. Haines and his *fiancée* were sitting side by side and that the man had touched the girl's hands. It was hardly good taste to be demonstrative in public—well, they might have waited till after dark! But what would you? This was Exile and people were unconventional.

Haines straightened himself a little, and dropped the ring into his pocket.

"There! is not that better? Don't you feel freer?" he said, with a little cracked sound in his voice that made her jump. "I think the headache will go now."

"I don't understand, Rodney!"

"Don't you? Does Mr. Merryn understand?"

"Oh, Rodney—but we never said anything—indeed! And we never meant to. How did you know?"

"Never mind, so long as I do know. You needn't say anything to-night. I'll tell Lady Stroud later on—that we have changed our minds." His voice had lost its melody, and he still spoke on that odd cracked note that made her feel him a stranger. She was so unhappy as yet that she could not even feel relieved.

"I am so ashamed of myself!" she said, with her facility for speaking the exact truth.

He turned upon her rather suddenly, almost as if he could have been savage to her had he lost his self-control. "Why are you sorry?" he said. "For falling in love—at last? Don't be sorry; it is the

one real thing you have probably ever done, the only awakening you can have. It is not a thing to be sorry for—no! no! It is the most refined way of torturing a soul that even God could conceive. That is why ——” he stopped abruptly and passed his hand across his eyes a little wearily. “I’m talking nonsense,” he said. “And you can’t understand, you poor child! Good-bye, Babs. I am going to send Bride to talk to you. Ask him to prescribe for your headache!” He laughed again, softly, but the jarred note was still there. Then he rose without any haste and, crossing to the club-house, caught Dr. Bride and sent him over to Barbara, jovial and evidently with no suspicion that anything was wrong. The girl sat still helplessly, with a feeling that something almost indecent had happened. It should not have all taken place here, out of doors, with half-a-dozen people almost within earshot! Then she missed the ring on her finger that had made her so uneasy while she wore it and slipped her right hand over her left. The diamonds would arrive too late from England now! She drew her breath with a sound between a sob and a sigh.

“Haines says he is bound to play one rubber, and then he’ll try to get away,” said Dr. Bride with a chuckle. “Awful thing bridge, Miss Playfair! It’s as solemn an engagement as a moonlight tryst! You don’t play?”

“Yes, a good deal. But I have had a headache all day.”

Her eyes, wandering to the tables, really saw Haines sitting down to the game with three other men. Perhaps after all it was not so horribly serious

as it had seemed to break an engagement ! Perhaps that cracked note in his voice was her fancy.

A little later she glanced across at the table again, but Haines had gone and another man had taken his place.

CHAPTER XVI

“ By that faith I cannot share,
Fare thee well !
By this hopeless heart's despair,
Fare thee well !
By the days I have been glad for thee,
The years I shall be sad for thee,
The hours I shall be mad for thee,
Farewell ! ”

SYDNEY DOBELL.

RODNEY HAINES made his excuses to Lady Stroud on the plea of work. He had been extra busy of late, and had thrown himself into his duties with a fiery enthusiasm whose reason was obvious. He wanted to leave an excellent record behind him, and it was probable that his service in Exile would end next year and that he might be promoted. He was a valuable man over the finances of a colony, and he was moderately sure of being made Administrator if not at once a Governor—at any rate, he would be backed by very high praise from Sir Jonathan. He had always worked with the nervous force of his temperament, but of late he had had the incentive of a definite object in his future to spur him on, and had spared neither brain nor body. Something of the transparency which Barbara had noticed in his face was due to this, for he had given her not only the immediate worship, but the advantage of

his training in a service which asks more and more of the man who means to keep in the front. Everything was to be turned to account for Barbara—past record, and present experience, and future chances. Rodney Haines did not only give love—he gave service.

When he left the Club the sunset had faded away behind Banishment, and the sudden night had descended on the Rocks, darkening their outlines. There was sufficient light in the entrance to show him the roadway, but he walked like a man who is not quite sober, stumbled, and swore out loud, to the surprise of the Club porter. Haines was a man who never used foul language, and the oath had not been of the mildest. His own car—he had a two-seater—was standing in the road, and he took it home by himself, his servant not being on the spot. He drove quite steadily, though the Club porter had come out into the road to see him start, thinking that there was something wrong. He had not only heard Mr. Haines swear, but had seen his face.

The bungalow belonging to the Colonial Secretary was beyond the garrison lines a little further up the mountain side. It was perched in a niche of the Rocks by itself, and had hardly any compound owing to the nature of the ground. Haines was wont to drive his car neatly through the gateway and back her into the shed. To-night for the first time he hesitated, and a panic fear dawned in his mind that he could not make the turn—he should lose control of the brakes and slip backwards down the hill. His face was very tense as he engaged the clutch, and jerking round the wheel scraped through the

gateway, and when he entered the bungalow he found the sweat running down his face.

He got to his work at once, taking it up where he had put it down that very afternoon to go up to Government House for tea. His dread had been that he would not be able to concentrate his forces, but to his relief his brain was piercingly clear—almost unusually so. It seemed strung up to grasp certain financial problems that had eluded him earlier in the day, and he felt no tire, only an increased craving to go on and on and not to give himself time to think. He worked straight on from seven o'clock to ten without pause for food, and then suddenly the impulse stopped. He was conscious that he could do no more, though he was not tired; he knew that if he went to bed he should not sleep, but he had no intention of going to bed. He put the papers in order for his next day's work, locked his desk, and turned thirstily to the draught of open air that came in through the jalousies. His servants had been dismissed and had gone to bed. Haines walked out through the window on to the verandah and through the damaged gateway into the road.

People were not yet returning from dinner parties or card parties. There were lights in the Marines' mess, but no motor passed him on the road. He walked down into Fort and through the silent streets of the Arab quarters out on to the road to Reserve again. Overhead the sky was clear and rich with stars, and the desert wind met him as he left the last bungalows behind. He passed the mouth of the Cutting leading to Reserve, and held

on towards the desert, skirting the foot of the Rocks. It seemed to him that his toiling feet would never get beyond their boundaries and out into the dead sand, and he began to have a sickening horror and fear of the Rocks as of some animate thing that hated him and would rend and tear. They made a background to the quickness of his tragedy—the undeserved pain that had passed within their relentless walls.

It had all been so rapid, the coming of his love and the passing of it, that it had not given him pause for defence. He was conscious, too, that for him there was only one way of doing the decent thing—to do it quickly. Had he allowed himself time to argue or to reason it would have been in his own favour, and he would have clung fiercely to his hold on Barbara, battling to make her care for him, clinging to every shred of expediency and advantage that could give him a shadow of right. And all the time he would have known that without the essential thing his plea of position, or means, or devotion to the girl was as nothing. If she did not love him he was digging his own grave in binding her, for he would never have been satisfied with less. The fine, quick nature that made him an artist could not have solaced itself as a coarser one might with the humdrum of failure. The discord of their everyday life would have been always present with him, despite any sophistry of “settling down” and “getting on as well as most married people.” For after all it amounted to this, that she had not learned to love him, and she had learned to love Merryn. It was not a question

of one man's superiority over the other,—it never is with a woman—it was the one uncontrovertible necessity of her nature. Merryn was her natural mate and Haines only a mistake of her inexperience. His nervous force had swept her off her feet and taken her captive before she could get her breath ; but the captivity could not last before the judgment of Nature.

Haines walked on and on into the desert, as he supposed, but with the instinct of men lost in the bush he began to turn in his own tracks and make a circle. He first began to be aware of it in the horrid recurrency of the Rocks, whose nearing outline through the night drove him out again into the sand to flee from them. He struck miles into the desert as it seemed, only to find them overshadowing him again, until with a suppressed shriek he almost ran from them. The first numbness of the shock of breaking his engagement was passing from him, and he was beginning to feel the live pain of it. The sickening sense of loss was followed by a jealousy that seared him to think of her in the arms of another man, until the very dregs of his nature seemed uppermost, and he set his teeth against the wish that he had held her to her bargain, and gained the joys of the flesh at least. He could have punished her there—taken his revenge and enjoyment at the same time ; and a wave of heat went over him at the thought, passed, and left him shivering with cold. Passion was not less to Rodney Haines than to more animal natures—it was only a refinement of the same sense. The fineness of the man lay in the struggle that he made against

a self-indulgence that others would have excused as "natural" or "necessary."

It seemed to him that he had been walking for days and days instead of a matter of a few hours when the first light in the eastern sky began to show him his way. The desert lay out in ridges before him, speckled with the dark bushes of the camel-thorn and dying into dusk on the horizon. He had thrust the Rocks behind him once more, and struck out for the long road, now that he could see it like a brown ribbon in the dawn, the unnatural music of the telephone wires accompanying him on his way. The chorded notes fretted his ear, and reminded him of the monotony of one of Wagner's operas where the prolongation of a single note is supposed to represent the flowing of the Rhine. Mental and physical are so closely interwoven that the immediate effect of his trouble was an absolute sickness and sudden tremblings of the limbs. The cold of the desert was intensified in the dawn, and he drew his linen coat closer and shivered violently, but at the same time lifted his stricken face to the lightening sky and pressed his damp hair away from his forehead with both hands, discovering for the first time that he was wearing no hat. The fact suddenly awoke him to dim consciousness of ordinary things and the decency of keeping a veil between his soul and the world of men. He remembered that he must go back, and hoped it would be early enough to avoid recognition. They must not see him in that disordered state and with the face that he dimly surmised he wore.

Without knowing that he had turned, he found himself hurrying along the road again, the implacable outline of the Rocks still before him. But their significance began to awe him as the sun came up and struck their furrowed sides with greyish lights. He tried to keep his eyes upon the road before him, but they strayed stealthily to the Rocks, and an odd sense began to possess him that they were drawing him to them. He faltered and stood still in the roadway, looking back and forth like some hunted animal, while the sun beat down on his uncovered head, and showed in his face the ravages of the night. He was talking to himself, and was aware that he must have been doing so for some time. He heard his own voice clearly.

"Hervey's somewhere near," it said. "Hervey's got a house somewhere in those damned sands—if I could only find it. Hervey, old fellow, can't you take in a poor devil who's being killed by those accursed Rocks?" . . . Then it struck him how funny it was to talk like that, and he burst out laughing, and the sound frightened him more than the words. He shaded his bloodshot eyes from the glare and looked across the desert, and there to his right were the crests of palms that proclaimed the wells of Golgotha and Hervey's bungalow. Something seemed to break in his heart, and he set off running to reach it, sobbing dreadfully beneath his breath because of the fear that the Rocks would drag him back and hold him ere he got there. He babbled as he ran, stumbling among the camel-thorns, and when still half a mile from his goal he fell and lay face downwards in the broad day,

a limp heap of something white in the desert. He looked so dead that two great vultures hung hovering above him in blue air, undecided as to whether this were carrion or no; but fortunately his eyes were out of their reach, hidden in the sand.

* * * * *

Richmond Hervey was rung up early from the waterworks, for there was some fear of a fall in the Cutting. The men engaged on the pipes that carried the water to Fort had reported earth tremors in the great tunnel and the appearance of small fissures in the rocks. Hervey had already taken all precautions by timbering to prevent larger falls, but the staff were taken with panic, and unconsciously to themselves had become dependent on his strength and judgment. Hervey peeled his instructions through the telephone, with footnotes to the effect that they were a nursery of fools, and ordered early breakfast in Reserve and the car to take him through. There was nothing that should not have been managed without him, and he disapproved of incapacity. After his early fruit and coffee he had half a mind to countermand the car and leave them to learn adequacy by enforced responsibility. In his judgment it would have been days or even weeks before such slight warnings of danger as he had seen would have resulted in a complete collapse of the Cutting, unless some earthquake shock (such as had originally showed him the existence of the river) had again visited Reserve. In any case, there had been no occasion for immediately closing the Cutting, and

he hoped to avoid doing so entirely. But the motor being at the door, he decided that the early drive would be refreshing after a hot night, and took the wheel from his chauffeur. Half a mile from his own gate his attention was arrested by an exclamation from the Arab, and he checked the car to allow him to get down and investigate a heap of white linen in the sand at a short distance from the road.

"Another murder case for the Chief Justice!" thought Hervey with a grim smile. "I'll be witness for the prosecution this time, as having found the body, and hear whether any of the assailant's sisters or wives are of Everard's household in Banishment." He checked his ironical thought as his man came running back with a pallid face and distended eyes.

"By Jove! I believe it is a murder!" said Hervey. "Those cursed Arab knives again, and too much cocaine, I suppose."

"It is Haines Sahib!" panted the Arab as he reached the car. "There is no wound upon him, and therefore I think that he is smitten with the madness of the Rocks and will die!"

But Hervey was out of the car before he had reached the end of his sentence.

•

CHAPTER XVII

“ And there was one that followed her,
With that unhappy curse called ‘ love ’ ;
Last night, though winds beat loud above,
She shrank ! Hark, on the creaking stair,
What stealthy footstep followed her ? ”

ALFRED NOYES.

To some men a satellite is as necessary as their daily bread, and forms the basis of their mental diet. However brilliant their natural powers, they cannot use them without an audience, and, though they may be much stronger personalities than those who minister to their vanity, it really seems as if such Boswells were necessary for the development of their Johnsons.

Edgar Everard was of this calibre. Though he had been staggered by a sudden independence on Murgatroyd's part, and resented it with all the mean capacity of his nature, he was so dependent on the Crown prosecutor for food for his vanity that he could not afford to quarrel with him. He realised this in the moment of Murgatroyd's denunciation, and curbed his own passion, promising himself ample revenge later on. He knew himself Murgatroyd's superior in every way that he counted an advantage, and he had just gained an added hold over him through the knowledge

of his devotion to Claudia. That this very love should be the saving clause to lift the weaker man into the nobility of strength was an idea which could not dawn upon the Chief Justice, because he had not its capacity in himself. He looked upon Murgatroyd's attack on his own motives and actions as a momentary ebullition of temper, and was quick to adopt an attitude of tolerance that reflected credit on himself. All Everard's virtues were nicely calculated to his own advantage.

He had gone to Reserve, after Claudia's confession, ostensibly on business connected with his clerks, for the court would sit in a few days. But he did not pass the night at Hassan's as Claudia would have concluded he had done had she thought about it. Her own life was too full to allow her to speculate much on her husband in his absence, and had she known that he was in one of the lowest houses in the native quarter it would not have caused her more than a passing wonder that men could call that pleasure—much less desecrate the name of love with it. Everard himself would of course have charged his sins at his wife's door, even though he thought her the victim of his own salvation. And there are many better men who would be equally illogical and dishonest with themselves.

As the hours passed with Everard, however, his equilibrium recovered itself, and he began to arrange the situation in compliment to himself upon his usual lines. But he wanted an audience in order to shine properly in his own eyes, and for this he looked to Murgatroyd. He had made an appoint-

ment with the Crown prosecutor to meet him at the court-house in order to speak to him officially about the murder trial ; Everard had settled in his own mind that they should lunch together, and that he would heap coals of fire on Murgatroyd's head by his own frank kindness, ignoring what had passed between them, though never allowing Murgatroyd to forget it. When they met, however, he was really startled at the man's appearance after his sleepless night, and his expressions of concern were almost genuine.

"My dear Stanley, you look shockingly ill—quite ghastly!" he said with a plain spokenness that was by no means complimentary. "You have been worrying yourself, quite foolishly, for I never thought again of what you said in the heat of the moment. Indeed, I admired you for it!"

He could not conceive of any other cause of worry to Murgatroyd more important than himself and his own attitude ; but the Crown prosecutor flushed a dull, ugly red through his livid skin, and his hollow eyes did not follow Everard's every graceful movement as usual.

"I did not sleep—I walked about most of the night," he said.

"There! I told you you had been foolish!" said Everard. He laid his hand protestingly on Murgatroyd's gaunt shoulder, but there was a certain pleased triumph in his smiling eyes. "You will never be able to quarrel with me in earnest, Stanley—you would wear yourself to rags over it in a week!"

Murgatroyd did not answer for a minute. Then

he spoke with a gasp, as if he wrenched the words from himself. "I went to see Claudia this morning.—During my wanderings last night, or, rather, early this morning, I thought I saw a suspicious character, an Arab, hanging about your bungalow. But Claudia tells me that she heard nothing—it may have been a friend of one of your servants."

"Keeping guard over my house in my absence, were you!" said Everard, the pressure of his hand increasing affectionately. "You are a good old watch-dog, Stanley! But I expect that Claudia was right; Arab servants are all thieves or harlots."

"You are very good to take it like this," said Murgatroyd with a kind of stiff effort. "For after what was said between us I feel that I had no right to watch your house, or perhaps—to go and see Claudia." He spoke more slowly than usual and with less humility. But Everard clutched eagerly at the concession.

"My dear Stanley! You know I trust you as myself. I am going to prove it to you by taking you into my confidence—what one man in a thousand would not tell another. But I, as you know, am different to the nine hundred and ninety-nine! May I lunch with you to-day, after we have done with Somers and his depositions? I don't want to go home until I have unburdened my mind."

Murgatroyd gave the invitation demanded of him, but with unusual reluctance. It had been an unstated law between them that his house was Everard's and everything he possessed at his disposal. But his servility had gone from the moment when he rose up as Claudia's champion, and was not

to be so easily re-established. He was moody and silent all the morning, save in his usual methodical attention to official business, and not even to be roused by the Chief Justice's sallies, whereat Somers, the attorney, laughed heartily. But having ordered things in his own way, Everard was not affected by any surliness on the part of his tool; he had never been more brilliant after his own manner, joking even over the murder trial, and openly flippant in referring to the Azeopardi case.

"If they do not take longer to dispose of than they have to-day I shall not have a ten days' sitting, Somers," he said gaily, gathering his sheaf of papers together with his own finely-moulded hands. Everard thought his own hands artistic, and said they were more fitted to play the piano than Haines', who had coarsened his by using them for all sorts of hobbies. As a matter of fact, the Chief Justice's were much more fitted to pick a pocket. A criminal wants more delicate fingers than a musician.

"I hear there is a good deal of talk in the bazaars about this murder, sir," said Somers casually. "The people are determined that Haroun Ali shall hang."

"Are they?" The Chief Justice turned as swiftly on him as a beast of prey, showing his sharp-pointed teeth. "They have constituted themselves a supreme court, then, in the bazaars!"

"Oh, well, sir, I only repeat what I hear!" said Somers apologetically. "You know what Arabs are—they get excited over anything."

"I'll see a good many of them imprisoned if they get excited over my judgments!" said the Chief

Justice, with his eyes alight. "We shall want a new wing to the prison before we've done, Somers. Talk in the bazaars, do they! I would like to hear them talk in my presence!"

It was so obvious what would be the fate of anybody who did that Somers was silenced. Murgatroyd had not spoken, but as they drove away from the court-house in Everard's car he said heavily, "Somers did right to tell you. There has been some disaffection."

But Everard laughed with a kind of savage intoxication. "There will be more before I have done, Stanley! I will use the sword in my hand up to the hilt, and leave a record behind me when I leave that shall outlive me. Azeopardi must go, of course; and if the assessors cannot prove premeditation I shall discharge Haroun Ali."

"Do you think the man innocent?" said Murgatroyd bluntly.

"I think I have the power to discharge him!"

Murgatroyd did not speak again till they reached his lonely bungalow, and then gave a brief order to his butler about luncheon. He did not drink himself, but he placed wine before his guest, and Everard's eyes grew brighter still as he emptied his glass. With the stimulant his tongue was loosened, and he began to tell Murgatroyd what Claudia had told him, colouring the confession from his own standpoint.

"Stanley, there is nothing my wife would not do or bear for me! I see that now. At the time I was stunned by her confession—I could think of nothing but my own wrong. But I see now that

she did it for my sake. I must forgive her because she made a supreme sacrifice of herself for my safety. Yes, I say supreme sacrifice, and I use the word 'forgive' ! Many men would not be wide-minded enough to do this, but you know me—you know that I have an extraordinary power of grasping the realities of life and breaking the bonds of convention."

His voice had risen, and became full-throated as when he spoke in court. Indeed, he was absorbed in the vindication of his own attitude and almost oblivious of his listener, who had never uttered a word throughout the waste of words. Murgatroyd's knotted hands were clasped on his knée, the fingers twisting and untwisting like some creature writhing in agony ; but except for the involuntary movement he was motionless, and as the two men sat with the lunch-table and the wine between them Everard could not see those working hands. He was enjoying his own mental attitude, which must be an inevitable surprise to his audience.

" I left Claudia thinking that she had estranged me for ever," he said, flushed with the wine and his own self-admiration. " I am going home to tell her that this is not so—that I forgive her !—and she will be ready to fall at my feet and bless me. Who knows ? This may be the beginning of a new and closer union for us ! "

If he had half-forgotten his listener he remembered him in those last words and hoped to dip the sword in venom for him. He knew that Murgatroyd loved his wife, and intended to awake a physical jealousy by the hint of his marital rights. Physical

jealousy was Everard's chief test of love, and he glanced across the table with his brilliant shallow eyes to see if his victim winced. Murgatroyd was looking at him strangely, it is true, but what he said was ominous of a thought that Everard could not follow.

"Do not be too sure!"

The Chief Justice laughed with a spice of triumph. He thought the warning prompted solely by the wish, and could afford to brush it aside. When he left, still dressed in the vision of his own generosity, he laid his hand on Murgatroyd's shoulder again and urged him not to stay away from his house on any foolish pretext of misunderstanding.

"You will see a change between Claudia and me when you come!" he said. "We shall look for you."

He was in a mood of high self-glorification that lasted him all the way home. It was upon him still as he entered his wife's presence, and he looked at her with kindling eyes that saw her beauty afresh as warmer and more desirable than he had ever known it. And in that he judged rightly, for Claudia was developing in her own heart-happiness as a flower expands in the sunshine. He really thought that his desire towards her was an admirable thing, and saw himself in a halo of generosity, though his appetite had been whetted first by the discovery of Murgatroyd's devotion, and then by a strange inversion through her confession of Hervey's terms for the letter. Everard used swollen words about his honour, but the situation had begun to pique his interest and increase her value to him

rather than the reverse. His mind had reached a stage when a suggestion of debauchery at least was necessary to stimulate his passions. He was a decadent, and if his wife had been of the same type as himself he would have tried to discuss it with her, and played with the details, even while he professed a stereotyped repugnance. Had they not lived so remotely from each other Claudia would long since have lost the admiring attitude with which she had entered on marriage with him ; but it had needed his own action to open her eyes, his own self-revelation to expose him to her. She seemed to see him very plainly unveiled to-day as he came into the cool shade of the bungalow from the baked world outside, and she shuddered a little inwardly while she looked up with a civil greeting.

"Stanley called here this morning, Edgar, and asked for you. He was afraid that some Arab was trying to break into the bungalow in your absence ; but I heard nothing of it."

"I know, my dear ! I lunched with Stanley. He told me all about it. He is an old watch-dog—faithful old fool !" He seemed pleased with this phrase, which had lingered in his memory as appropriate, only enriched with the word "fool." "I have been talking to Stanley about you, Claudia. I think I surprised him."

"You surprise me."

"Why ?"—He did not wish his generosity to be forestalled or guessed beforehand, and he spoke almost sharply. His wife was sitting in her usual chair by the little table that had held her flowers, and now held her work-basket, for she was stitching

at some soft white work, and her wine-coloured eyes were not raised from her employment as she spoke. Everard sat down on the other side of the table, his narrow face thrust forward a little in his contemplation of her.

"What surprises you, Claudia?"

"That you should discuss me with Stanley Murgatroyd—or any man."

"Oh, nonsense. Stanley is an old friend—a faithful old watch-dog to us both." (He certainly liked that phrase.) "It was like speaking my heart out to myself."

"Or wearing it on your sleeve——?"

He did not heed the quiet irony, for he had got his opening. "You will be more surprised when you hear what I said about you, Claudia! I told Stanley of your wonderful sacrifice for me—yes, wonderful! I used that word. My poor girl, you thought I left you in just anger yesterday—you thought my attitude was that of the outraged husband; and so it might have been with most men. But you did not know *me*!"

He paused as if expecting some cue of admiration or entreaty; but she was as silent as Murgatroyd had been. She did indeed seem breathless with surprise, for her busy hands had stopped their work, and her eyes, dark with something like incredulous fear, were looking straight before her.

"You told Stanley about—that!" she said at last in a low voice.

"Yes, and I justified you!" he returned, his voice rising in triumph. "Oh, you may trust me, Claudia! You need not fear even to speak of it

to me. I am struck with your courage—your great devotion to me. I think of nothing else. Do not be afraid that I shall shrink from you. Yesterday you were able to blurt out nothing but the bare facts. You may tell me the whole story now. I shall only pity you, for you were a martyr in my cause ! ”

Claudia's hands had risen instinctively to her breast with a movement that was a characteristic of hers. She pressed them hard over her raging heart, which seemed as if it must kill her. The scene was hideous to her, with its elements of grotesqueness and ugly tragedy and the intolerable vanity and vileness of the man before her. If he had cursed her she could have forgiven him better. For in a flash she realised that he was curious ; he hated Hervey as a weak man hates a strong, and would like to have stripped him of all decency even by the means of his own wife's degradation. Had she not loved Richmond Hervey the thing would have shocked her with regard to herself. The two together became intolerable.

“ There is nothing to say,—nothing but the bare fact,” she said, and her own voice sounded cracked and hoarse to her from the strain she put upon herself to speak at all. “ You must resent it or not as you please. But this must never be discussed between us again.”

He gave a restless movement of impatience. “ But, Claudia, you do not understand me ! ” he said. “ I am willing to forgive it.” He looked at her half-furtively, the heaving lines of her breast, the beauty that no mental disturbance could make

less, and one hand moved stealthily as if he would fain grasp at it. "I am willing to take you back!" he said in a whisper. "I will make you forget all this—to-night."

She did not cry out. She rose quite steadily, thrusting her chair back with a force that grated on the carpetless floor. But the face she turned on him was like the Gorgon face that changed men to stone.

"There can never be a question of that between you and me again," she said finally. "I have told you so once before. You are mad to think it. Let me go away to Europe at once if you are wise. But the less that passes between us now the better. I have heard from yourself what your principles are—they are not mine. You have used your power to ruin other innocent men, and you mean to do it again for your own advantage. I warn you now that I am not of your party, and you had better let me know no more of your schemes. There is this Petition out against you, of which I have told you already. You, as a judge, know what miscarriage of justice means, and the consequences to yourself of an inquiry by the High Court."

Her voice had regained its music, and she never faltered even though he started up, with his eyes flaring. Before he could speak she had turned away from him and gone into her room. He heard the key turn in the lock significantly—he heard the door closed against him once and for all.

CHAPTER XVIII

“Thou art like silence all unvexed,
Though wild words part my soul from thee.
Thou art like silence unperplexed,
A secret and a mystery
Between one footfall and the next.”

ALICE MEYNELL.

SAID's village was of the most elementary kind, and consisted merely in the thatched huts of half-a-dozen families, each in its own outer fencing. There were no shops and no industries, Golgotha having absorbed both the trade and the workers. The women of the community, however, wove the mats, each for her own family, with which the tiny square huts were made, something after the fashion of a Somali kuria, though they were hardly so skilful as the Somalis. The huts were arranged in rows facing each other, with a small courtyard between, and narrow passages leading from one of these miniature blocks to that behind it. Even the outside wall, which answered to the “ring fence” of an English landowner, was made of rough matting. It was only the ovens that were of mud.

Mrs. Everard had left her carriage at Golgotha, where Said and his camel awaited her, and mounting the beast, rode out the two miles across the sand and the camel-thorn. In the dazzling distance

the furthest ramparts of the Rocks ran out to Fort Headland, and she kept them in sight all the way on her left ; but to the right there was nothing but the long ribs of sand. Said hardly spoke to her. He strode on barefooted over the desert, leading his camel, in a seeming great content, for his dark face was serener than a smile beneath the white turban. The camel was not yet full-grown, but it moved easily, and only uttered the protesting " Ha, ha-ha-ha-ha-HA ! " at intervals when some unknown cause disturbed its mind. It was considerably smaller than the great bull that had carried Mrs. Everard to and from Reserve, but seeing it by daylight she was struck by the peculiar similarity to a lion in certain points of the beast. In colour it was the same greyish fawn as the lion ; the tail with its fringed end was something the same, and the great width of the head with its small ears was not unlike as seen from above. Only the long, contemptuous lip and the unfathomable eyes were totally dissimilar, and it is these and the quaint body that mark its characteristics to most people's minds. Mrs. Everard liked camels, and rubbed her foot gently against the swinging neck as they slipped over the sand in a gait between a run and a walk. She liked, too, the high seat that enabled her to look out widely over the desert as they journeyed.

" Is that your village, Said ? " she said at last. " I can see roofs amongst the camel-thorn."

" Yes, ya Sitt. It is not far." He led the camel out of the narrow track they were following, across rough ground that would have tried a less practised walker, and a minute later they were outside the

mat wall and he commanded the camel to sit down. Half-a-dozen donkeys and two other camels were already tethered there eating a scanty meal of hay, and Mrs. Everard saw some lean hens scratching in the sand.

She stepped down from the native saddle and followed Said inside the fence, finding herself almost at once in a courtyard and the centre of his family. Some of them she knew already—Othman, his elder brother, and old Mahomed, his uncle, who worked in the pottery works at Golgotha; but the women and children she had, of course, never seen before, as this was her first visit. They were of a poorer class than Hassan's household, but the faces were no less beautiful, and in truth no less happy. Mrs. Everard flung up the blue veil she had been wearing in the glare of the desert, and they crowded about her, kissing their own hands before shaking hers with that prettiest of all salutations, and holding their children up for her inspection.

Said's house was not yet finished, as he said, for he was but newly married, so Claudia was ushered into Othman's, which was typical of all the rest. It was some ten feet square—for it consisted of the one room—and all the furniture was but a row of cushions placed all round it on the mud floor. The mat walls were plastered on the inside to give them more stability, and were adorned with at least twenty saucers of various patterns and shapes, from painted tins to fine china. There were no cups, though a trayful with coffee were brought in immediately afterwards by way of refreshment.

Apparently the saucers were regarded as supremely ornamental, and were hung on the walls as Europeans hang pictures.

Mrs. Everard sat down on the cushions with the family grouped round her while she drank her coffee. They almost filled the room—the children in the centre of the floor and Said and Othman standing in the open doorway.

“ And which is Said’s wife ? ” she said.

A young woman leaned forward, smiling and showing a row of flawless teeth between full, curved lips. She was much more mature in appearance than Said, though they were probably about the same age, and if not so beautiful a type as her husband, she was suggestive of a natural maternity in the lines of her swelling breasts and free hips. She sat on the cushions with her dull red surra tucked round her, and looked at Claudia with frank admiration. Indeed, the murmured comments on their visitor’s gold hair, fair skin, and deeply marked eyes were almost embarrassing, though entirely free from any jealousy. They liked to look at *al Siyyidha* as at some beautiful jewel, and to listen to her low voice. One of the men had been making nets, and a dozen laughing voices demanded of Claudia whether she could net too. She took the shuttle and needle in her hands and passed the twine swiftly to and fro to show that she knew the stitch, and the women clustered round her to see. It was while they did so that her accustomed ears caught the gist of an Arab phrase passing between the old man Mahomed and Said, and her heart seemed to stop beating as she followed the sense.

" If he does not kill Haroun Ali they will kill him ! "

" Without doubt. But al Sitt were well rid of such a lord."

Claudia gave the netting back into the women's hands with a smile, hoping that her lips were not so stiff as they felt. She had warned Everard of the unpopularity of his judgments as in honour bound ; but she had not felt herself further responsible if he were impregnable in his folly, believing that his chief danger lay in an investigation by the Colonial Office, or more serious still by the Privy Council. Now the danger seemed to start up nearer at hand, menacing him personally—a disaster which he had only feared through the publication of the letter he had written to Hervey. For she could not mistake that phrase of Mahomed's and Said's answer :

" Without doubt. But al Sitt were well rid of such a lord ! "

She had recognised the young Mahomedan's devotion to her, a devotion such as a Christian might give his patron saint, for Said did not rank her as he did his own women, but rather as something miraculous and without sex ; but she had not realised his antagonism to Everard, or the tales of him that must pass in the bazaars. She was feverishly anxious to get Said alone and question him as to her husband's danger, but she could not cut short her visit, and had to make a tour of inspection of the other houses, which were exactly similar to Othman's, and to see the shell of Said's, which was rapidly nearing completion.

"It is a very nice house, Said!" she said kindly. "And what will you put in it? You must let me send you something for the furnishing!"

Said's wife smiled and dimpled with pleasure. She loved presents, and no doubt *al Siyyidha* would send them something very beautiful that should outshine all the rest of the family possessions. Said did not smile, but his acceptance of her offer made Claudia feel that the honour would be hers in giving.

When they left the village, and Mrs. Everard remounted the camel, the sun was already beginning to slant across the sand, and the shadow of the camel went before, a thing of the strangest angles on stilt legs, running across the desert. Claudia waited till they were back in the track and then leaned forward from her seat and spoke.

"Said!"

"Ya Sitt?" He half paused, the camel rope in his hand, his beautiful face uplifted to her in the evening light.

"What is this that is being said about the trial of Haroun Ali?"

"The people know that he killed the man, ya Sitt!"

"They think that he must die also?"

"It is just!"

"And if he is—discharged?"

"There is no saying. It would be well to warn the Lord Judge!"

Claudia looked down at him wonderingly. There was no alteration in the beautiful gravity of his face, and she marvelled that he had been induced

to say so much, for her knowledge of the Arab told her that had she asked Othman or Mahomed they would have been blankly innocent of all knowledge, even though a riot were impending the next hour. It was only Said's respect for her that caused him to answer her questions, but she had a vague feeling that it would not deter him from some public demonstration against Everard if Haroun Ali escaped justice.

She leaned back in her seat in silence, thinking what she ought to do. Undoubtedly there was mischief brewing, or Said would not have admitted so much, but the difficulty was to check Everard's reckless abuse of his position and to avoid any connection between her warning and her visit to Said's family to-day. She was quite determined that the village in the sand should not suffer, but she knew that revenge would be Everard's first action if he traced any reports of discontent to that quarter. She had made no secret of her excursion, though they had hardly exchanged a word since the afternoon before. Everard appeared to be sulking, his furious temper only awaiting an outlet, and she had been worried as to her plan of action. She did not want to appeal to Hervey if it could be helped, her preference being to go to Europe as soon as might be and break the tie to Everard in that way; but she was aware that Everard would oppose her now by every means in his power, and the matter was further complicated by the revelation she had had in the village.

As they neared Golgotha her thoughts turned instinctively to Hervey as the way out of her

difficulties. She had meant to take the risk of calling at his house under some conventional excuse, knowing that Said would not talk of her; now she had an added reason in the necessity to consult him. He was her Man, and all the woman in her demanded that he should share her burdens. They passed through Golgotha, with its squalid streets and the crowded zareba, where the Arabs from Health left their camels the while they trafficked in sweetmeats and the tainted meat of the market. From under her blue veil Claudia looked with pitiful eyes at the poor, hunched beasts with the packs still on their backs and probably saddle-sores beneath. She was an active member of the S.P.C.A. in Exile, but it was difficult to get a perfectly new idea into the heads of a race that has always been more or less cruel, not from intention, but from ignorance.

"I am glad your camel is not like these, Said!" she said with a shiver. "I could not ride one of those poor ill-treated beasts."

"Their masters are poor—they come from the Port and the villages further in the desert," said Said simply. The explanation seemed to him adequate, but Mrs. Everard did not pursue the subject. She was glad to get away from the little white houses and out on to the road, along which she could already see the crowns of Hervey's date-palms swinging in the wind. Her eyes grew soft as velvet and her lips parted with a quick breath. But it was Said who pointed to the bungalow with his driving stick to draw her attention.

"There is sickness there, ya Sitt. A kawagar

(gentleman) was stricken by the Rocks to-day, and Hervey Sahib found him in the desert."

"Another!" exclaimed Claudia. "Why, it was poor Mr. Smyth, of the Eastern Telegraph, only a few days ago!" The news had not reached her as yet, and she inquired the name. "Do you know who it was, Said?"

"I heard that it was Haines Sahib, the Colonial Secretary."

Claudia almost uttered a cry of dismay. "Oh, Said, it can't be! Why, I saw him only yesterday going up to Government House. How dreadful! I must stop and inquire."

The carriage she had ordered to drive her back to Fort was standing near to the entrance gates of Hervey's bungalow, but Claudia, without dismounting, rode the camel in and up the drive, telling Said to go back and explain to the *abuggi* that she should not be long, after he had left her at the bungalow. She dismounted at the door, and hastily thanking Said she went forward to meet Hervey's white-liveried butler.

"Can I see Mr. Hervey? I hear that Mr. Haines has been taken very ill here!"

"Yes, madam," said the man in careful English. He recognised Claudia, but whatever he knew, or guessed, his manner was that of the well-trained Oriental who knows and sees nothing. "Mr. Haines is here. He has a nurse. He is very ill!"

"Is Mr. Hervey at home?"

"Yes, madam. I go to find him."

He ushered Claudia into the familiar hall where she had sat and smoked with Hervey after her

memorable dinner. Her blood was tingling with the memory as she stood there, despite her distress about Rodney Haines, and when she heard Hervey's step upon the stairs she turned her face away almost childishly and could not quite look at him.

"I am so very distressed," she said, giving him her hand before the butler. "I have been out to see a village in the sand with my Arab teacher, and on the way back he has just told me of Mr. Haines' seizure. It is very sudden, for I saw him only yesterday morning. I felt I must come in and inquire. Is he very ill?"

"He has a temperature of 106 degrees," said Hervey inclusively. "Won't you come into the dining-room, Mrs. Everard, and I will give you some tea."

He led the way to the more private room, with a nod to the butler to get the offered refreshment. When they were alone he took her face in his hands and looked at her long and thirstily.

"Claudia, you are like a well in the desert!" he said. "I believe you carry healing in your eyes!"

His own face was lined and tired as if with watching, and she put her hands upon his great shoulders and returned his gaze with some concern.

"You look very weary, Ritchie! Have you been with him all day?"

"Most of it. I was obliged to leave him to the nurse and doctors this morning, after I got them out here, and go into Reserve. They are in a funk at the works because there has been some slipping and they expect a collapse."

"Two troubles at once! Is it serious?"

"Oh, no; only it will delay those pipe lines a bit," he said grimly. "And it may shut up the Cutting for a day or so and send you a mile round to Reserve by the old road. But I hope that may not happen. At present the danger is negligible, and as it has only occurred on one side I think we may be able to stop it going further. It will be a nuisance if the Cutting is closed."

"That does not matter," said Claudia, with no premonition of how it might matter for life or death. "Tell me about Mr. Haines. Where did you find him?"

"About half a mile out on the sand, lying on his face."

"Was he stricken by rock madness?"

"I don't believe in it!" Hervey shrugged his shoulders. "I have lived with the Rocks for fifteen years, and they have not beaten me yet! Haines was overworked and had a private trouble to finish him."

"Oh, don't boast, Ritchie! I have grown superstitious with regard to you. I am so frightened at my own happiness."

He flung his arm round her shoulders almost roughly. "Nothing shall separate you and me!" he said. "You are with me every minute of the day, even when your body is absent. I am beginning to believe in spirit communion, Claudia."

"I told you you would!" Her eyes flashed into violet lights between the lashes, and the short upper lip lifted with its hint of a smile.

"Am I learning the A.B.C. of love, darling?"

"I think so, Ritchie." She laughed a little, forgetful for the moment of the tragedy upstairs. "I know even by the way you touch me. You don't *clutch* as you did! I am not going to vanish into thin air."

"Was I very brutal?"

"It was only your way of showing me. You are showing me still, only in other ways."

"I shall never quite lose hold of the physical showing, Claudia!"

She stepped back, but quietly and without haste, as the tea was brought in; and then they sat down and ate and drank together, and it seemed most natural and happy, as if they were doing it every day. Of all meals, breakfast and tea create the most domestic atmosphere. There is always a sense of invitation, of host and guest, at luncheon and dinner.

"Tell me why you think Mr. Haines has a private trouble," said Claudia thoughtfully as she drank her tea. It was growing dusk in the large room, but he had not rung for lights, and Hervey's servants knew when to wait for orders.

"He has broken with Miss Playfair," said Hervey bluntly.

"Did he tell you so?"

"No; he has not been capable of telling anybody anything as yet. He has babbled—simply gibbered—all day. But that is the gist of it."

"I wonder why!" said Claudia slowly. "The girl herself came to me some days ago, as I told you, and asked me for advice, and I told her that it was as bad as murder to marry without love."

I would have told her that it was worse—an outrage on decency—if she had not been so young. But I could not put it plainer.”

“ You were brave to say so much.”

“ I have a right to speak. I have bought my own experience. But I do not think she meant to break it off herself, nevertheless. At least, she would not do so yet. She was thinking it out. Something must have happened.”

“ You thought it was Merryn ? ”

“ I thought it might be. Men are so very final ! A girl is simply a creature of possibilities, and it may not even have taken form in her mind. Do you think Rodney Haines is going to live, Ritchie ? ”

“ I can't say. The doctor thinks not ! ” Hervey never minced matters. “ If we can pull him through we shall.”

“ I shall think of you so much ! But don't fall ill yourself.”

“ I ! I'm like a camel—nothing kills me ! ”

He laughed tenderly, and his large hand closed over hers. Each fresh proof of her interest in him, or her tenderness, seemed like a most beautiful gift to Hervey. He did not know that he had ever wanted tenderness, but as she gave it wholeheartedly, so he took it, drinking it into his thirsty soul like one who had been dying of drought.

It was not until she was leaving that Claudia remembered to tell him what she had overheard in the village. “ There will be trouble about this murder trial amongst the Arabs if Haroun Ali is discharged,” she said. “ Stanley Murgatroyd did tell me something, and I tried to warn my

husband. But what I heard to-day makes it more imperative. Do you think I ought to speak again? "

His face set in a kind of grey sternness as it always did at the mention of Everard. "I would rather you did not," he said plainly. "For I think you are only wasting your breath on your own showing, and I hate your having any recrimination from him. But I am thinking only of you."

"I know," she answered simply. "There is a way, however, in which I think I could force his attention—in which I could frighten him. I did not want to use it, but I left myself the chance for safety's sake."

She had used a damning word, as she knew by his quick movement towards her, even as they stood at the door waiting for the carriage which he had sent his servants to call.

"Claudia, will you promise me to come straight to me if you are in any real trouble—if there is really any need of 'safety'? " he said, and his voice shook a little. "If you do not, I think I cannot bear to let you go—I must keep you here now, from this minute."

"Oh, I promise—I do indeed, Ritchie." She did not laugh—the sense of his strength and protection was far too precious for laughter. "But I always feel you in the background as my safeguard whatever I may do."

"I can't bear this life for you!" he burst out restlessly, even as the carriage came in view. "I feel as if we lived on a precipice. And this illness of Haines hampers me a little. Remember, Claudia,

even if I am out here, you will be safe in the house in Reserve. My servants have orders. You will remember ? ”

“ I will remember ! ” she said, and with the word pledged back to him she sprang into the carriage and was driven away.

She had no opportunity of speaking to Everard that night, for he dined out at the American consul's, and she hesitated to sit up and wait for him. The defence of her locked door was all that assured her of safety, and even then she was conscious of sleeping lightly, her sense still on the alert. He did not breakfast with her either, and she learned that he had gone into Reserve again early, but the weight of her new knowledge began to lie heavy on her conscience, and during the morning she rang up Murgatroyd and asked for the date of the murder trial. She was aware that it had been fixed for an early date, for some purpose that she did not guess, unless it were a fear of straining the temper of the people too long ; but Murgatroyd's answer struck her as ominous.

“ The trial of Haroun Ali is fixed for Wednesday,” was the Crown prosecutor's formal answer. He had come to the telephone himself, but he spoke almost as to a stranger.

“ This next Wednesday ? ” she persisted.

“ Yes.” —

“ But that is the day after to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes.” —

Claudia's heart beat a little thickly. It was very near, but there was still time. She had an engagement that afternoon, but she did not expect Everard to return until dinner-time, and she felt that it would

be intolerable to sit and wait for him. When she returned, about six o'clock, she learned that he had just come in and was in his room, and without waiting to take off her hat she sent the butler to ask if he would come and speak to her as soon as he was at liberty. The formal summons marked her attitude, and she forbore intentionally to go and knock at his door herself.

He had been changing the clothes he had worn all day, and when he came into the drawing-room he looked cool and easy and well groomed. A satisfaction with his own personal appearance always acted like a soothing cordial upon Everard, and, despite any anger he might feel against her, he could afford to smile at Claudia as he sat down in a lounging chair and took a cigarette from the table near by. Claudia moved her position a trifle, so that the little table with the ash-tray and matches was between them. She glanced at the open jalousies onto the verandah too, as if to be sure she was not shut in with him. But both actions were instinctive, and she never knew why she had made them.

"You have been out, I hear," he said casually. "Calling anywhere?"

"I went to the Bunneys, and on to the Club for half an hour to play bridge until Lady Stroud arrived. They wanted a fourth, and I had promised Mrs. Bunney."

"Heard any news?"

"Only that Mr. Haines is no better."

"Rather worse," corrected Everard with a smile.

"I heard that at luncheon. He may go at any minute."

She looked at him with a momentary wonder in her long-lashed eyes. She had known that he did not like Haines, but that any human being could so blatantly please himself with a man's possible death seemed to her incredible. She remembered now that he had spoken in the same tone when he first told her that Lestoc had gone into hospital after six months in prison, and that at the time she had mechanically refused to understand it as too hideous a thing to realise. Even now that he had left her no illusions with regard to him she changed the subject abruptly.

"I heard to-day that Haroun Ali's trial is fixed for Wednesday, Edgar," she said steadily.

He nodded. He was looking down at the nails of his daintily-kept hands, and fastidiously smoothed away a piece of skin at the base of one as he spoke. "Yes, Wednesday," he said. "Somers has the matter in hand."

"Somers?" she said in some surprise. "I thought he was not thought much of as an attorney. Why not Ralston?"

"Ralston was struck off the rolls last year, my dear. You forget!" He showed those pointed teeth a little in a smile that did not reach his eyes.

Claudia had forgotten; but she remembered now that Ralston had not been Edgar Everard's tool as Somers was likely to be, and surmised that he had been "removed" for this reason when Everard first became Acting Chief Justice. The Bar at Exile consisted of a barrister and two attorneys, the Crown prosecutor being also police magistrate, assignee in bankruptcy, and several other things that made his

co-operation with the Chief Justice a consideration to him. There was no one to oppose Everard seriously.

"I am not asking whether you have made up your mind as to Haroun Ali's sentence," said Claudia deliberately, after a moment's thought. "That lies on your own conscience. But I am obliged to warn you that the man is firmly believed to have committed the murder by the Arab population, and that the jury will probably find him guilty. If you discharge him in spite of that there is likely to be a demonstration."

She half expected one at the present moment, recognising that his temper was waiting for an outlet to be revenged upon her, but he took it with a quietude that was ominous in conjunction with the face he turned on her.

"And would you advise me to go against my 'conscience' and hang him, whether I believe him proved guilty or no, for fear of angering the Arab population?" he asked smoothly. "Really, Claudia, for a woman as professedly moral as yourself the suggestion is infamous!"

"I do not advise you either in one way or another," she said composedly, and with an indifference that obviously galled him. "But I read the evidence myself, after the magistrate in Banishment committed the murderer for trial, and it is so strong that an acquittal would give an impression to any unprejudiced mind that there was miscarriage of justice. All I ask for—indeed, I insist—is that you carefully weigh this in your own mind before you find means to acquit him. If you decide to do so

whatever the result to yourself, I hope that you will forewarn the police. That is all."

Her level voice seemed to carry some sort of conviction with it, for that furtive look came back to his face and with it the anger that is born of fear.

"And where did you hear all this, Claudia?" he asked with less suavity and more impatience. "This solicitude for my safety is very right and proper in a wife, even one who locks the door on her husband!" He glanced at her to see if the personal shaft went home, but she took no notice. "But you must have some foundation for this kindly warning. Come! where did you hear it?" he ended sharply.

"You had better ask Stanley Murgatroyd," she said quietly. "He has heard it too."

He flung back his shoulders and expanded his chest with a mirthless laugh. "Oh, so you have a common source of information!" he said. "Well, it would be uncivil to say 'Mind your own business' to a lady, but let me tell you that you and Stanley can warn me to the Day of Judgment before you'll either of you influence one word of my judgments. I am not such a coward as you think me!"

She glanced at him almost pityingly, recognising the old mental pedestal on which he always placed himself though he might be proved a cheat to his face. She knew that he was alarmed and that he would take the coward's chance to secure himself if he really saw cause for fear. But he was also too certain of the security of his official position, and as long as he had the support of the Government he

believed in no general risk. What he had feared was Hervey's power to rouse the people backed by his own disclosures, and a stab in the dark for personal reasons, or that he would be set upon at any unarmed moment. A general rising or demonstration at the court-house would be a matter for the police or the troops; and, indeed, he hardly believed it possible. He was fatuous in his sense of judicial power and influenced by some unknown motive not to hang Haroun Ali. Claudia recognised this, but she had done her best to warn him, and believed that she had so far succeeded that he would inform the police. She could not bring more pressure to bear when it was a question of a man's life, even though he was blatantly guilty; but she had another word to say on a different matter.

"Wait a minute, Edgar!" she said as he half rose and seemed inclined to regard the whole matter as finished. "I want to speak to you about the Azeopardi case as well."

"I should not advise you to! I have stood enough interference for the time being."

His tone was that of the bully, but her manner remained absolutely unmoved.

"You forget, I think, that you took me into your confidence without any wish on my part. You have told me plainly that Azeopardi is to be removed out of your path because of his share in the silk trade. I did not wish to know this, certainly, but you insisted on my understanding it. Now I have something to say on my side."

He was listening now. His stealthy hands were playing with each other as they hung linked between

his knees, and his eyes were narrowed almost to two slits. But Claudia held steadily on.

"There was evidence of the motive of this case against Azeopardi in that letter you sent to Mr. Hervey," she said, and did not flinch under his glinting eyes even from the reference.

"Yes, and that evidence is destroyed!" he said jeeringly. "Are you going to remind me of the price I paid for it? The price of my honour?"

Her short upper lip lifted a little scornfully, without the smile that usually made it beautiful. "It seems to me that your honour was lost long ago—in Banishment!" she said significantly. "We will let that pass. Mr. Hervey does not hold any power over you with regard to the Azeopardi case——"

"No, and may rot in hell before he does again!" he said exultantly.

"But I do."

"You? What in——"

"I hold the letter."

"The letter was destroyed!"

"The letter was not destroyed."

"I burnt it!" he gasped, staring at her with horrible distended eyes.

"Excuse me, you burnt the envelope that had held it and a copy that I made in case you should look at it. When you saw your own handwriting you were in too great a hurry. I calculated on that."

With a sudden oath, too coarse to record, he lurched forward out of the chair and was almost upon her. "You are lying! Show me the letter!" he almost shouted.

"I am not lying, and the letter is in safer hands than mine at the present moment," she said, and her tone was very quiet compared to his, though she had moved swiftly back out of his reach.

"Hervey?" he said with stiff lips.

"No, not Mr. Hervey. He has nothing more to do with it. I have placed that letter with instructions to examine it under certain circumstances, where you cannot get at it. If you adjudicate on this Azeopardi case fairly it will not be used against you. But if there is any more miscarriage of justice——"

She was interrupted by the crash of the little table between them. He had sprung at her, blind with rage, his hands groping wickedly for her throat. She had not realised that a man with unbridled passions is worse than a madman, for the insane have some cunning of prudence. For a minute she was in his grip, his left arm holding her in a vice, his right hand seeking for something with which to kill. She saw in a flash how easy it would be for him to murder her and lay it on the Arab servants—even to commit a double murder and swear that he saved her from violence and that the Arab's death was an accident. For a minute they rocked and swung in a silence that was far more dreadful than a shriek, and then with a last desperate desire for life she flung her whole body forward instead of holding back, trusting to her height to overweight him. He staggered with the unexpected impetus, caught his foot in the fallen table, and fell, nearly dragging her with him.

The minute she felt his grip relax Claudia shook

herself free and, turning, darted across the open space through the pillars of the dining-room and into Everard's own bedroom, swinging the door behind her. She knew that he would take a minute to pick himself up and follow her, and the pause would probably sober him ; but she was too instinct with terror to depend on that. All she hoped was that he had not seen which room she had entered and would break into her own. She crossed his room and sprang out of the open jalousies, then turning away from her own room ran along the verandah that went all round the bungalow and dropped into the compound before she reached the servants' quarters. She bent low, almost doubling her body in two, but still running, and passed safely round the angle of the house to the front. Then for a moment she hesitated. The gate was wide open, but between her and it was the wide sweep of the compound, and away in the house behind her she heard a door bang and expected Everard to emerge on the verandah. He might come round on this side of the house, or he might turn towards his own room. It was hardly a moment during which she hesitated before with a gasp that was a prayer she had rushed out of the gate and was running fast down the hill, still close under the friendly wall of their own compound.

She was still, fortunately for her, dressed for the outside world, her hat on her head ; but she had no veil, and it was impossible to run once she reached the broad road at the foot of the Rocks. It was growing dusk, and there were few vehicles about, thank God ! She did not know that her breath was

gone when she reached the foot of the hill, or that she was bruised and shaken; she was only conscious that she still lived, and that she had saved her life, somehow, for Richmond Hervey. The tragedy of the past few minutes seemed almost impossible save for her shuddering limbs. No one would have believed it even if she had told them. Only she herself knew that in a breathing space her husband might have been a homicide and that she had stood in mortal danger. In all men's lives there is possibly the one moment when they have the will, if not the intent, to commit murder. Claudia Everard had seen it plainly, face to face, that was all.

There was a little gharry, or two-seated vehicle for hire, coming along the road from the desert, possibly from taking some of the richer Arabs back to Golgotha. It was not such a carriage as Jalbhoy let out to the Europeans in Exile if their own cars were under repair, but a springless linen-covered thing drawn by a shambling Somali pony. Claudia hailed it before her running feet had faltered to a walk and directed the driver hastily to Reserve; but even as the vehicle turned round to take her back to the Cutting she looked out with shrinking eyes along the way she had come to see if she were pursued. Then she composed herself, forced herself to lean back in the little carriage, and drew herself as far as might be out of sight. It was a desperate fight, and she was playing the game of life for Hervey's sake.

She still had a chiffon scarf over her shoulders, but it was torn—she supposed when she wrestled with

her husband. She took it off, and, tearing away the torn fragments, used the remaining width as a veil to tie over her hat. Then she breathed more freely, for the scarf disguised her somewhat, but as they turned into the Cutting the sound of the waking echoes of the place made her start and glance behind again. There was nothing to be seen from the receding entrance through which they had driven, but far down the road she thought she heard the horn of a motor—a Gabriel horn that she recognised.

For a minute Mrs. Everard sat forward gripping her hands, and with her head bent. There were some camels in front of her, and possibly another vehicle, but the traffic was regulated by gates at either end, only a certain number being allowed through at a time, and the next string, whether foot passengers or vehicles, having to wait until the preceding had passed out into the road to Reserve. Claudia had heard the gate close behind her, but whether the motor were waiting there or had gone on down the road she could not tell. As they passed out of the Cutting and clattered down the broad road to Reserve she calculated that her only safety lay in the maze of streets in the native quarter wherein she could hide herself. She directed the gharri driver to put her down at the market, on the outskirts of the town, and paid him there, seeing him drive away with relief. If he were met and questioned she would be well out of sight and lost in the bazaars before she could be pursued.

She knew the direction of the street in which Hervey's house stood, though she had only been

there that once ; but she had never been on foot in Reserve before when by herself. Fortunately she had often gone about with the Mission sisters, visiting all sorts of Arab houses, or she might have been more frightened. The Arabs passing her in the dusk turned and stared, and a man spoke to her in passing, probably thinking that she might not understand. She caught a few words and almost ran. Then she remembered that the sisters often went alone, and it gave her courage. What they could do she would do—they for their religion and she for her love.

She crossed one street and turned into another, becoming confused with the odd turnings and narrow byways. She was afraid to ask her way for fear of attracting attention or insult, and held steadily on, looking for certain landmarks to guide her. She thought afterwards that she must have missed the street she wanted some half-dozen times, and have walked for half an hour, before she recognised it suddenly and with dusty clothes and tired feet made her way to the door in the wall.

It was quite dark now. Overhead the stars were coming out, and that strange scent of dried woods and powdered spices was wafted to her from the clothes of some passing Mahomedan lady come out to take the air. Claudia thought of the great cushioned divan, the security of the walled-in roof, and the rest and peace for her weary limbs. Not until the door opened and a servant held a lamp high over her head to see her face did she feel safe. Then she heard an exclamation, and the man stood aside to let her pass in, closing the door behind her.

With the sound of the grating lock the stress and strain of the past few hours seemed to sweep over Claudia with a horrible reaction. She half-stumbled, and if the man had not helped her she could not have got up the stairs and into the house. Then when she reached the room where she had found Hervey she sank down quietly on the couch and looked round the empty space with grateful eyes before they closed. She felt like a lost child that has come home.

CHAPTER XIX

"Oh, my beloved, so passionately wooed,
In your new freedom, sweet, forget not this—
That he who loves you gives you liberty
And joy transcendant, when the rightful lover,
Predestined by mysterious powers to be
Heart of your heart, the days at length discover.

Think then a little, not untenderly,
Of one who walks where only sad ghosts hover."

PHILLIP BOURKE MARSTON.

"It is positively appalling how the calls mount up!" said Lady Stroud. "One would not think there were so many people in Exile. I believe I have twenty to pay. Really, Mr. Merryn must take the car and leave cards for me instead of going off to polo."

"Poor devil!" said the Admiral, helping himself liberally to his favourite breakfast dish of curried eggs. "He hasn't had much chance to play anything lately. Haines' illness has overworked the Colonial Treasurer and myself, and we in turn have overworked our staffs!" he added with a small grimace.

"Have you heard how he is this morning?" said Lady Stroud anxiously. There was only one "he" at Government House since Mr. Haines was

reported at Hervey's bungalow with "condition serious" added by the Port surgeon.

"Barbara was at the telephone this morning. Where is the girl? She's late!"

"I don't know," said Lady Stroud almost irritably. "She must have heard the gong. It seems to me that people in any trouble always show it by being late for meals! Oh, here she comes—and Mr. Merryn."

Barbara and the Flag-Lieutenant entered at the same moment, it is true, but from different sides of the dining-room, whose many openings afforded them ample scope. They said "Good-morning" to each other formally, and it was obvious that they had not met before to-day. Merryn, indeed, had been at work since sunrise, and Miss Playfair had not been out of the bungalow. She took her seat quietly, and answered the Admiral's inquiry for Mr. Haines in a lifeless tone.

"His temperature is a point lower, Uncle Jonathan—105 degrees."

"Come! that's something gained. How did they say he was?"

"The nurse answered me. They are afraid of collapse after the fever."

The girl's manner was quite composed, but her young face was almost haggard. It seemed an awful thing that had happened to her, and Lady Stroud's resentment was disarmed, though she guessed at unrevealed motives for the tragedy. She had noticed that Barbara no longer wore the gold filigree ring on her left hand, even before the news of Haines' seizure, and because she had grown

very fond of the Colonial Secretary she had naturally laid the first blame on the girl.

"Barbara," she had said as soon as she could get her niece alone, "had you had any quarrel with Rodney?"

"No, Aunt Fanny. We did not quarrel."

"But you no longer wear his ring!"

"He took it back!" said Barbara a little wildly. "He came to the conclusion that we had made a mistake and gave me back my freedom."

But Lady Stroud was outraged in her dignity by this bald statement of fact minus extenuating circumstances.

"Mr. Haines is an honourable man and a gentleman," she said decidedly. "He would never have broken the engagement unless you had yourself wished it—apart from the fact that he was hopelessly in love!" she added, almost exasperated by the girl's silence. "Did you ask him to release you?"

"No, Aunt Fanny."

"But he knew you wished it?"

"He thought it was a mistake," said Barbara doggedly. For once her bald honesty seemed to have deserted her. She would make no confidence.

"Did you wish it, Barbara?"

"I agreed with Mr. Haines that it was a mistake!"

"But the initiative must have come from you in the first instance! Unless you want to lay the blame on poor Rodney Haines, I think you had better acknowledge that. You told him that you did not care for him? He found it out?"

"I am ready to take all the blame, Aunt Fanny," said Barbara with an effort. "It was my fault. But until Mr. Haines is better I can't discuss it."

She was really very much to be pitied, though Lady Stroud did not realise it. The breaking with Haines had been a humiliation to her, because it lowered her standard of herself. She did not know how she had betrayed herself and Merryn, but clearly she had not been "playing the game" as she had promised that she would, as Haines had found the chink in her armour. Immediately following on his breaking of the engagement had come a momentary reaction in which she had felt herself free, with the weight of all that had depressed her taken off her shoulders—the demands on her nature which she could not satisfy, the growing sense of disaster in a future spent with Haines, the misery of discovering that love was something quite different, and that it had lain, for her, in another direction. Then for a few hours she had had a shy sense of looking forward to a real happiness—not at once, not until she had gone home to England again (no doubt to be scolded), but when she met Merryn at home perhaps, in the cold northern temperature that suited them both and in the atmosphere that they knew and understood best. Even Barbara's prognostications of bliss were not very romantic; she had a vague idea that it would be "awfully jolly" to meet Merryn at home, in the summer, and to go about together in the country, where there was plenty of tennis and cricket and otter-hunting. I do not think she actually imagined him proposing to her in a stickle,

or plunged the affair into several feet of cold water while they mutually watched a holt ; but I am quite sure that she would have taken the situation with hearty good-will and accepted him in the same breath with which she cried " Heu Gaze ! "

She was not, anyhow, allowed much time for her day-dreams, however prosaic. With the next morning had come the news of Haines' illness, and the shock of it all had left her paralysed. She could not tell Lady Stroud about her broken engagement of her own free will, and only admitted it on being questioned. While Haines lay between life and death it was impossible to set gossip going by announcing that the marriage would not take place after the fashion of a verbal *Morning Post*; it seemed indecent even to think of it. It was horrible to Barbara to be sympathised with as a broken-hearted bride-elect when her drawn face was as much due to remorse as anxiety, and her native honesty made her position well-nigh intolerable. But she bore it with set lips and declined to say more than she had to Lady Stroud. She had never mentioned Merryn's name in connection with it; she hardly spoke to him or looked at him beyond civility, and she never went into the office now to print photographs. Being in love had wrought that change in her at least, that she had learned to defend her one secret.

She had not really faced the possibility of Haines' death until the morning when she learned the fact that once the fever left him the doctor and nurses feared collapse—learned it baldly through the telephone, where there is little chance of softening details.

It was a solution of all difficulties impossible even to contemplate. Barbara's face seemed to have altered to Lady Stroud as seen across the breakfast table; it looked no longer young, and she saw as in a flash what she would be like as a middle-aged woman.

"If she were really in love with him one would say it was that," said Lady Stroud to herself. "It is remorse—it is not love, but it is terrible all the same. I wonder why she should blame herself so cruelly just because she could not care for him sufficiently and he found it out! It is not as if there were another man."

And she never even glanced at the Flag-Lieutenant, eating hot breakfast cake and discussing the coming murder trial with the Admiral. Cupid takes many unlikely forms, but he never took a more unlikely one to Lady Stroud's mind than the young man with the smooth burnt face and good blue eyes that said nothing. She was really fond of Arthur Merryn, who reminded her of her own boy, at present somewhere on the Cape Station; but perhaps for this very reason she regarded him from the standpoint of a mother, rather as a little boy who must be allowed cricket bats and guns to play with, but who could not be seriously thinking of women from a man's point of view.

"I'm afraid he is very unpopular, sir!" he was saying to the Governor. "And if he lets Haroun Ali off it will make him more so."

"Are you speaking of the Chief Justice?" Lady Stroud chimed in, glad to get away from the contemplation of Barbara's face. "I hear that Mrs.

Everard has gone to Health. Captain Bunney came in last night while you were at Major Dalkeith's, Jonathan, and told me he had seen Mr. Everard at the Club. It seems rather sudden—I think she must have done it to avoid the trial to-morrow!"

"Wise woman!" said the Admiral drily. "Have you heard any rumours from the Arab quarters, Merryn? I will not have a demonstration."

"There may be a crowd to hiss him, sir."

"The police can see to that. It would be as well to warn them, perhaps."

There was a line in Merryn's smooth forehead as he peeled an orange. Fruit was a luxury, and a consignment from Bombay only appeared on the breakfast table at Government House. "The police are Arabs, sir," he reminded the Governor. "And I heard that they sympathise with the bazaars."

"Oh, Jonathan!" said Lady Stroud involuntarily. "Wouldn't it be well to warn the garrison?"

"We should ensure a demonstration if it got about that we had done that!" said the Admiral drily. "Make these people think you expect it, and they'll give it to you. I don't want any street brawling and rifles going off unintentionally. If the police wanted help they could telephone the Marines and have it in twenty minutes."

Mr. Merryn said nothing. In his mind he wished savagely that he were a policeman with a street brawl or anything else in front of him. For he felt that there are times when a man wants to knock a few heads together.

It was a wretched day. No one on the staff had a chance to play polo or to get away for a swim, and

there were twenty calls to be worked off Lady Stroud's list. One would not have thought there were so many houses to visit in Exile, as she had said. In the afternoon two men came to call and hindered Lady Stroud from going out—Mr. Yarrow and a brother officer in the Marines—and the talk turned on the murder trial again. "Battle, murder, and sudden death!" Merryn began to feel as if they were in the air, and pricked even his steady nerves.

"I suppose there is no hope of Haroun Ali being hanged?" said Lady Stroud as she dispensed tea to her visitors and wished they would go. "Really, I feel like a murderess myself demanding the poor man's life like this! But if he is released they say there will be an epidemic of crime."

"There will be an epidemic of missiles for Mr. Everard!" said Yarrow explosively. "He simply *can't* discharge the fellow with all the evidence against him. It's an open scandal if he does."

"Yes," said Lady Stroud with a sigh. "Only Mr. Everard has made so many open scandals—he seems to like them! And after all, nothing has happened to him so far."

"Something is going to happen this time," said Yarrow. "You mark my words, Lady Stroud; if Everard lets Haroun Ali off there will be something to do in Exile at last!"

"You are making me dreadfully nervous, Mr. Yarrow—and you look quite pleased!"

"Well, I shouldn't be very sorry if the Chief Justice had to run for it!" said Yarrow ingenuously. "I don't love him, Lady Stroud. If it

weren't for the uniform I'd like to go in the crowd and yell 'Ibn kelb!' with the best of them."

"But he represents our authority—we must uphold our own judge and his decisions, whatever they are."

"Yes, unfortunately. Oh, it will be all right, of course. Let's hope that Everard will come to his senses in time and hang the man. Have you heard how Mr. Haines is to-day?"

"No better, I am afraid."

"Miss Playfair must be awfully cut up!"

"Very," said Lady Stroud briefly, and across her memory—for Barbara was not present—rose the vision of that drawn, matured face at the breakfast table. Certainly Barbara was "cut up" by something. "Won't you have some more tea—and cake?"

She hoped they wouldn't, but of course they did, being still young enough to like cake; and then when they were really gone it was too late to do more than leave a few cards. The red motor car wound up and down the crazy Rocks, checking at the little bungalows like cardboard houses set on the plateaus, and Mr. Merryn got in and out and handed pasteboard to the Arab butlers with an impassable countenance, while his hostess not infrequently watched him from behind the jalousies.

"There's poor Mr. Merryn A.D.C.-ing as usual! Lady Stroud is not coming in. I suppose we are next on the dinner list!"

A strange custom this of making a ticket of your name to pass the recipient up the front stairs of colonial society. Lady Stroud's cards were all

tickets, "Admit Captain and Mrs. So-and-so to visiting terms at Government House," the acquaintance to take rank according to His Majesty's commission. Sometimes she thought of England, when her husband's service should be over and they should move in a sphere where visiting-cards have gone out of fashion, perhaps because there is no society to be admitted. Of all unsalaried officials I think a Colonial Governor's wife serves the Empire most uncomplainingly, and her husband's success very often rests in her busy, quiet hands, upholding the British prestige indoors and out and finding her personal interests a forlorn hope.

The red motor came back to Government House at half-past seven. The sun was down, and the quick darkness was creeping up over the Rocks, but the electric light was not yet blossoming in the garrison.

"Thank goodness that's over!" said Lady Stroud. "How many did we do, Mr. Merryn?"

"Only ten, Lady Stroud."

"Ten more, and most at a distance! I can't call in Reserve to-morrow if this dreadful trial is on. Has his Excellency come in yet, Mahomed?"

"Yes, Excellency. He dresses himself!"

Lady Stroud suppressed a smile and went through the drawing-room to her own room for the cherished confidences of the half-hour before dinner. Mr. Merryn walked into the dining-room for a lemon squash, for his throat was dry with the dust. As he crossed the hall again on his way out to his own quarters he hesitated, turned to his right, and went quietly into the compound. It needs the sight

of young eyes to see a figure in the dusk of Exile, but he had not been mistaken in that white gown. As he neared her he heard her humming a waltz tune under her breath, and it was significant that she no longer sang to strict rhythm and nothing else.

“ It might have been !—If we had known
All our hearts told us in the past.
But another came between . . . ”

“ I cannot bear to see you looking like this—like you do every day,” he said in a low, guarded tone, and somehow he seemed an older man with the very words. “ Would it make it any easier for you if I went away ? ”

“ No ! ” said Barbara under her breath. She looked up at him through the dusk with horrified eyes. “ Do you think it was my fault ? I have thought and thought, and I cannot tell what it was that made him know—what it was I did ! ”

“ You have told me nothing—— ”

“ He took back the ring he had given me,” said the girl, almost under her breath. “ He said he knew—— ”

“ There was nothing to know ! ”

“ I think we both played the game,” said the girl simply. “ I would have told him so if he had given me a chance. I did say I was sorry—and he told me not to be—— ”

“ Are you sorry ? ” he said quickly. He did not mean to be selfish, but it was his right to know.

“ No,” she answered. “ I am not sorry—I am only miserable. About *him*, you know ! ”

“ Yes, I know,” said Merryn. So long as she

was not sorry—sorry for that brief minute in the office and their breathless revelation—he did not mind her being miserable. It was the only decent thing for her to be under the circumstances.

“It’s rotten altogether!” he said comprehensively. “His being ill like this and—not being able to do anything!”

Barbara looked down at her long white hands in the dusk. The third finger of the left hand felt odd and bare, and she rubbed it mechanically. She had forgotten that it was in the compound, almost on this very spot, that Rodney Haines had knelt at her knee and persuaded her past reason, for associations did not speak to her; but she had never grown easy with that outward and visible sign, her engagement ring, and the loss of it reminded her of her discomfort.

“Do you think—I ought to go to him if—when he gets better?” she said in a troubled voice.

“If he asks for you——?”

“I’m afraid I ought to offer!”

“No,” said Merryn quite firmly. “You might do more harm than good. If he asks for you I suppose it’s only decent to go, but if not—he doesn’t want to rake it all up. I shouldn’t in his place.”

She heaved a sigh of relief. “All right! I’m glad I asked you. You always understand.” They looked at each other solemnly through the growing dusk like two children. “Good-night!” said Barbara softly. “I’m not coming to dinner; Aunt Fanny said I needn’t. There are people dining here.”

“Good-night!” he said almost stiffly. Her left

hand was free of that damning pledge ; she was free herself to follow her own inclination. And yet—Rodney Haines was lying at Hervey's bungalow fighting for his life. No, not yet. It wouldn't be "playing the game," somehow.

He drew back for her to pass him, tall and very fair in the dusk. His face, with its rather boyish reserve, had suddenly gained the purpose of a man's. He was probably the duplicate of a hundred young Englishmen who love the prototype of Barbara Playfair, but for all that he seemed to have won an individuality.

Barbara raised her eyes as if by instinct to the heavens, even as she passed into the bungalow, and though they showed her nothing but the cloudless night skies of Exile, she felt as if somewhere there ought to be a rainbow.

CHAPTER XX

“ Eyes shall meet eyes and find no eyes between,
Lips feed on lips, no other lips to fear !
No past, no future—so thine arms but screen
The present from surprise ! Not there, 'tis here—
Not then, 'tis now ;—back, memories that intrude !
Make, Love, the universe one solitude,
And, over all the rest, oblivion roll—
Sense, quenching soul.”

BROWNING.

RICHMOND HERVEY sat in one of the wide, airy rooms of his bungalow, with his broad shoulders propped against the cushions of a lounging chair and his head resting against the padded back. It was a restful attitude, chosen for patience, for he had been there for some time, and expected to watch an hour longer. Outside the wind was blowing freely across the desert, but finding nothing to impede it in those naked miles of sand ; therefore it made no sound until it reached the telephone wires or the buildings of Golgotha. There it pressed round the walls, shattering silence. The jalousies of the upper room where Hervey sat were half closed, but he could hear the wind in the verandah outside and the sighing of it in the crowns of his date-palms. On a table near at hand were bottles and stimulants and ice wrapped in flannel in a bucket.

On the bed lay something that tossed and jabbered and held wordless conversations with its own soul, because the veil of the flesh was worn thin and it was face to face with a bottomless gulf.

Hervey had been at work during a portion of his vigil, for there was a heap of torn papers waiting to be cleared away by his servants and certain letters and memoranda tied into packets on the table by his side. A residence of fifteen years leaves something to be cleared up, even in Exile, and he was getting his affairs in order. He had sent in his resignation already. There was no indecision in Richmond Hervey for good or ill. Where he set his will, there his foot followed.

As the sick man's mutterings had grown worse Hervey had laid aside his employment and simply waited. There was nothing to do but watch, the nurse had told him, and he could call her if there were any marked change. As long as the fever lasted they did not fear. She took an hour off gladly, leaving Hervey as her lieutenant, for experience had taught her that he was to be trusted at his post. The night nurse was sleeping, but the day nurse—the one Hervey had relieved—was thankful to go out in the garden even in the hot noon, to walk a little under the behindi trees. The outside world was baking, but there was always the desert wind. It was not like the Fort, where the Rocks flung out furnace odours from their sun smitten sides.

Hervey was not looking at the bed, and trying not to listen to Haines' broken words. He had a feeling that it was indecent to stare at and listen to his helplessness. His thoughts had gone to Claudia, and

the wonder as to how soon they would start for Europe. It was like wandering in a flowerful garden to think of her—a better garden than the one below. She made him feel the cool scented wind and see the rainbow of the flowers, and follow the windings of some dear path that led past springy lawns and the sun and shadow of great trees. The man's harsh face softened, and the lines seemed to be wiped out of it by some gentle hand, so that he looked younger than his years. She had given him such a wonderful thing! The beauty even of a lesser love might have made something different out of the strong material of Hervey's nature had he chanced on it years ago; but Claudia had brought the dowry of a queen with her and came with her heart full and running over. It was as if she poured out riches at his feet and dazzled him.—

Suddenly he was aware of a sharper tone in the sick man's murmurings and of words disentangling themselves from the broken babble. Hervey rose more quietly than seemed possible with his great frame and went round to the bedside, leaning over his patient with a little movement of protection that was almost pathetic. Haines had raised himself in bed, and was staring with his hollow eyes out of cavernous sockets. All the angles of his face seemed accentuated, and a three days' growth of beard altered him almost out of recognition.

"All the little devils running over the desert, Hervey!" he said grasping at Hervey's muscular arm with his long fingers. He had wasted very quickly under the fever, and those musician's hands were like claws. "Running away in lines and lines—

always running. Don't let them pass me, Hervey—Hervey—Hervey ! ”

His eyes wandered away from Hervey's face as though the momentary recognition had died away, but he still sought for his friend in the distance and clung to his strength. Hervey stood patiently leaning over him, letting those thin hands hold on to the reality of his great muscles.

“ All right, old man ! ” he said soothingly. “ I won't let them pass. It's all right, Haines ! ”

The clinging grip relaxed after a minute, and the blue eyes went blank as the babble died down to mere words repeated over and over : “ Rocks—rocks—rocks ! Desert—desert—desert ! Thirst—thirst—thirst ! ” He lay back on his pillow in a little while, and Hervey drew the sheet over him, still leaning above him with that patient tenderness, and trying not to hear the name that came to Haines' lips with the sound of a wail : “ Barbara !—Barbara !—Oh, my God, this pain !—Barbara ! ”

The nurse, entering a little later, found him still by the bedside, and with her quick soft step came close to his side.

“ Has he been restless ? ” she asked with that grave restraint that marks the professional from the flurried amateur. “ There is a telephone message for you, Mr. Hervey ; I came up to relieve guard.”

“ He recognised me for a minute,” said Hervey, drawing back slowly to let her take his place. “ Then he wandered off again, but he seems quieter as long as I am near by.”

“ That is more than he has done as yet,” said the nurse. “ I will take his temperature again.” But

as she turned for the thermometer Haines raised his heavy lids and looked straight at them both for a minute.

"Hervey, don't leave me!" he said faintly. "You won't leave me in the desert?" Then more slowly, "I can't get back!"

"No,—it's all right, Haines. I'm here, you know!" Hervey repeated monotonously.

Then there was silence, while the nurse and Hervey stood still watching for a moment in the windy heat of noon and the shade of the sick-room. Outside the date-palms soughed and swung together, and inside their two hearts seemed to beat in trained alertness. Then the nurse took up the thermometer and nodded to Hervey.

"It's all right," she said; "I thought something was coming—but it's all right. You had better go down and answer the telephone."

He walked out of the room and down the echoing stairs with hushed feet. They were holding the line all this time, for it was urgent. The Government engineer was wanted in Reserve.

"Those damned earth tremors again!" said Hervey. "I told them not to lose their heads for a few rocks tumbling down. It was bound to happen." He rang the bell and ordered his car, going back to the sick-room to tell the nurse that he must go to the works and should lunch in Reserve. She could ring him up if anything—happened.

"It is all right; you must go, and there is nothing you can do here," said the nurse with a glance at the face on the pillows. "Dr. Bride will be out again this afternoon. I should have some lunch before I

went, if I were you, Mr. Hervey. You look very worn."

She was a plain-spoken woman, but sensible. He did not want to wait, but he knew the necessity of food taken regularly and sparingly in Exile, and he sent for a light meal before the car came round. By the time he reached Reserve it was, in consequence, past two o'clock, and then his work absorbed him for an hour or two. At four he was free and the staff at the works were well in hand again, the human units going with all the whirr of machinery under the steam-power of Hervey's will. He got into his car to drive down to his house for tea and to look for some memoranda he had left there, for there had been no telephone message from his bungalow summoning him back to Golgotha.

It had been a disheartening day, and he felt jaded and tired both with the strain of his friend's illness and the timid fear of responsibility amongst his workmen. The whip-lash of free speech had driven that unwilling team to the collar, but Hervey's mouth was set in its grimmest lines as he entered the door of his own house. But there the sunshine suddenly met him and the strain ended, for his Arab servants, bowing low, brought him a just-breathed message.

It was only two words that altered the day—" *Al Siyyidha!* " But his heart leapt and he felt as if the burden slipped from his shoulders. She was here, and he did not ask how or why—*Al Siyyidha*, "the Lady of high rank," for there was only one lady for whom his servants would use the more ceremonious term instead of the usual "*Sitt*,"

unless it were the Governor's wife. He walked up the stairs with that light tread of his, and was in her presence before she was aware, for she did not turn on the instant, as she would have done had she heard him.

Claudia was standing on the further side of the large room that opened on to the stairs and the well-space of the centre of the house, very much where he had stood on the night when she had come to him in Reserve. She was, in fact, near the bookcase as he had been, turning over the leaves of a book as if in imitation of his occupation on that occasion and humming a song to herself happily as she read. Her attitude was so natural, so much at home, that he had the full pleasure a man may feel at seeing the woman he loves in his own house as if her place were there. Hervey stood still a moment and watched her. He felt suddenly breathless with his own piercing joy—a joy as sharp as sorrow. He remembered those excursions of his into the narrower byways of passion, and shrank from the sordid memory. In the light of this great thing that had come to him those misspent hours seemed a slur upon it, even though he had hardly dignified them by the name of Love. He had called them experiments, he remembered, and excused them on the vicious plea of idleness. As he looked at Claudia he marvelled at the meanness of his own tastes.

And then she turned, the book still in her hands, and saw him.

She came up to him laughing, tossing the book on to the divan as she passed, and put her hands up

on his shoulders with a caressing movement to which he was beginning to look forward hungrily. "I have come home!" she said. "No wonder you look astonished; but I would not telephone, because I knew you were with Mr. Haines, and I did not want to bring you out."

"How long have you been here?" he asked quietly, his arms round her waist, and his hard cheek again her soft one.

"Oh, for the past week," she answered with a certain carelessness as if the life that lay behind her final step in coming to him hardly mattered. "I have come for good, Ritchie!"

"I hope so—it seems to me very good!"

"I don't know——" (a trace of anxiety clouded the brightness of her face). "But there was nothing else to do. I have nothing with me; I think I shall have to disguise myself in a kameese and go out to buy some clothes."

"If you make a list you will find that the butler can get you most things that you want. I have trained him. Have they attended to you properly?"

"Oh, beautifully. And I found everything I wanted from the first night, spread upon my dressing-table, even to a sponge!"

He drew her across the room to the tea-table, which was already waiting, and sat down beside her. "Tell me how it all happened!" he said gently.

"There is nothing to tell. I warned—Edgar Everard" (it was noticeable that she no longer said "my husband")—"that if he gave another unjust judgment in the Azeopardi case I should

use the letter against him—have it published if necessary.”

“What letter?”

“The letter he wrote to you.” She flushed with a sudden memory and hid her face against his shoulder. “He thought it was destroyed, but I had really kept it as a hold over him in case he persisted in misusing his power like this. It seems to me appalling,” she added more slowly, “that our judicial system can place such power in the hands of any one man! If he abuses it he cannot even be prosecuted by a subject; it is only the Colonial Office which can start inquiries, or the High Court which could arraign him, and he knows that that is a costly and lengthy proceeding. He is not really afraid of any official inquiry about such a little colony as Exile so long as he can accomplish his design first and make a fortune out of the silk trade. The one thing he *was* afraid of was the publication of that letter, because of the native feeling it would stir up against him and the chance of violence.”

“And yet they say that he will discharge Haroun Ali when the trial ends,” Hervey pondered; “and run the risk of a demonstration.”

“Because he will not believe that the Arabs are greatly interested in the matter, or that he is not safe in his official capacity. He depends on the Government being behind him, and thinks that the police can keep order. But I hope I frightened him a little. He knows, anyhow, that the letter is still in existence, and that I shall not hesitate to use it.”

“Was he rough to you?” he asked quickly.

“What did he do when you told him?” No one

but a lover would have grasped, with quickened senses, some peril near her in the situation, she had spoken so quietly.

"Yes, he was—rough," she said deliberately, but she turned her face away a little, as if to avoid any betrayal. "He worked himself into a passion and talked wildly. That is all—except that I thought it better to come here."

"It was much better"—he was not satisfied, and she knew it, but she did not want to startle him even though she had escaped bodily violence—"but I shall be better pleased when I take you to Europe. Does he know where you are?"

"Oh, no. I simply—came away." She thought of that flight down the road, the springless gharry, the horror of pursuit, and her hurried walk on foot through the town; but she thrust the thoughts away from her lest the shadow of it should touch him through their responsive minds. "It is over now. Let us talk of something else. Let me make tea for you. I told the servants I would make it myself. I am very conceited over making tea; it is the one thing that I think I do better than any one else. Every one has one thing that they think they do to perfection, you know. What is yours?"

He laughed, stretching himself luxuriously in his easy chair. "Packing up a parcel, I think," he said, as she carefully measured the tea and warmed the teapot. "Most people get the ends so untidy. I am quite professional! I believe I was meant to be a grocer."

"Lady Stroud once confided to me that she laid a fire better than any housemaid, and when she was

in England she sometimes longed to do it just to show them how. I think if I felt I was a genius in laying fires that I should simply *have* to follow my bent, whatever the servants thought ! ”

“ I am not sure that I admit your genius over the tea-making ! ” Hervey teased her. “ It won’t be strong enough for me. You only put in three spoonfuls ! ”

“ One for you, one for me, and one for the teapot. The real art lies in pouring a little boiling water on it first to get the goodness out of the tea and filling up afterwards. Most people simply flood the teapot and pour off the washy surface into the cups ! ”

“ I see your conceit is not to be shaken. You speak like one of those circulars instructing one how to make sparklets, or toast bread on an iron plate that never gets hot ! ”

“ I had to be a little academic, or I should not have impressed you. There is your tea—don’t dare to say you don’t like it.”

“ I don’t dare ! ” said Hervey meekly as he stirred it. “ But I think you might have put in some sugar. Nothing gives me such a shock to my system as a mouthful of sour tea ! ”

“ Oh, I *beg* your pardon ! I don’t take it myself, and so I never thought you could be so nasty.” She dropped a lump in with dainty fingers, and then like a child put a small piece in her own mouth appreciatively.

“ Claudia, you will spoil your teeth ! ”

“ Never mind—I daresay I can still bite you if you give me cause.”

“ Oh darling with the eyes serene,
And with the teeth so white,
The vow was proper to the scene—
Superfluous was the bite ! ”

quoted Hervey lazily. “ I shall buy a little muzzle and take you out on a chain. And every one will pity me very much. They will say, ‘ There goes that poor man with the biting wife ; there’s a new bit of him gone every day ’ !!! ”

“ Well, there’s enough of you to last me for a good many meals ! ” said Claudia indignantly. “ You needn’t grudge me a few chops ! ” Then as they broke into mutual laughter—“ I think we must be very happy,” she said. “ We talk so much nonsense.”

“ I know I am happy,” he said, leaning forward to lay his hand tenderly on her dull gold hair. “ My only fear is lest you should regret it ! ”

“ Why should I regret it ? ” she answered with a kind of still brightness even in her gravity. “ I do not regard marriage as a sacred bond unless it has the sanction of one’s own soul. People who prate of its morality are only conventional cowards. Where I made a blunder was in marrying too young, but for years I made the best of a very bad bargain.”

“ I wonder that you did not get a separation ! ”

“ It would have been more decent. But I knew very little of the man I married, by his own desire. He wanted a figure-head, in some sort a companion, and I did my best to fulfil both duties. As to the rest of his life, I never speculated about it until he absolutely forced me to face it. I should not even

take the trouble to defend myself like this to any one else——” She broke off with a movement of the head that was superb.

But being a man he was greedier for her than she was for herself. “If I heard criticism of you I think I should kill some one!” he said simply. “Do you think he will get a divorce?”

“I can’t say. His character has so altered to me since he stole into his own house like a thief that night that I am quite at a loss to say what he will do. But even if I am never legally your wife, Richmond, I should not regret coming to you, unless it really did you harm; but I do not see how it could——” She paused with a sudden questioning glance of her upraised eyes. They were reddish purple in the subdued light, and the dense lashes made them darker still.

Hervey took her face between his hands and kissed the curved lips with slow pressure. “You are never to say that to me again,” he said. “And never to think it. You cannot bring me anything but good so long as you love me. It is only that I cannot bear to think of a rough wind blowing on you.”

“I shall never feel the wind, even of adverse criticism—while you are with me. I feel very deeply about marriage and the fallacy of the legal tie; that is why I tried to warn Barbara Playfair. It is not a thing to part with lightly, because it is a kind of compact entered into between men and women. But it seems to me that it is more one’s commercial honour that is involved than any religious sentiment. If either party does not fulfil their obligations the compact ought to be null and void. And apart from

that, I think that a great love justifies the breaking of a loveless tie."

"That's the sweetest heresy I ever heard!" said Hervey fondly.

"Yes, but don't misunderstand me; had I been normally married, and had then found that my feeling for you was overwhelming—a thing out of all proportion to marriage or other ties—I should have gone to my husband honestly and told him that I was going away, even if you had not loved me in return. I should not have gone to you in that case; but I would sooner earn my living by any labour than live as one man's wife with my whole body and soul belonging to another. As it was, of course, I was merely living under Edgar Everard's roof in the position of a housekeeper."

"Supposing there had been children?"

"It would have made no difference, provided they were another man's. Under no circumstances could I abandon a child of yours—it would be part of our very love for each other. But I should only have the animal instinct of maternity for the children I bore to another man, and it would not hold me long."

Her words started the side issue in Hervey's mind. "Pray God we do have children!" he said. "It would be a great joy to me. I believe I'm really rather domestic, Claudia."

Her face changed from its earnestness to the former laughter. "I will let you order the dinners if you like," she said, "and scold the servants. I think the mere sight of you with a duster in your hand would awe the pertest housemaid to do her duty. You are so very impressive!"

She had purposely refrained from asking him after Rodney Haines, seeing the lines in his face from watching and nursing; but before he left he told her of those discouraging vigils.

"Bride thinks he won't pull through," he said bluntly. "I do. Poor devil! I expect he'll curse me for a bit too, if I bring him back to life."

"You ought to be getting back to him," said Claudia, with perfect understanding. "Do you know that it is nearly seven o'clock? It seems a minute since you came, doesn't it?"

"I wish I could have stayed——"

"We shall have all our lives for you to stay!" she said in a low voice, her head resting against his breast as they stood at the head of the stairs. "I don't think we should either of us be really happy if you didn't go back now. You will come to-morrow?"

"About the same time. I have had to give orders to close the Cutting, but I hope it will be open again in a day or so, and it's not much further from Golgotha to drive the old road. Claudia, I lay no restriction on you whatever, but I would rather think that you were not going out. Can you live like an Arab lady for me and think that I am your lord and have shut you off from the world?"

"I will promise not to go out, unless it were for some extraordinary cause," she said readily. "I will make a list of purchases for your servants, as you suggest. I can get all the air I want on the roof."

"Good-night then, my darling!"

She stood at the head of the stairs to watch him

out of her sight—a tall white figure with a face most beautiful, and tender with love. At the foot of the stairs he turned again to look at her, and it seemed to him that he stood in a gulf of darkness while her figure was set far above him in light, for the lamps had been lit in the room above but not in the lower portion of the house. Long after his car was clear of Reserve and its parti-coloured streets he still saw Claudia standing, at the back of his brain, with the rain of light upon her.

CHAPTER XXI

“ He sitteth on a throne, and hideously
Playeth at judgment ! . . .

. . . Sceptred, thron’d, and crown’d,
The foul judging the foul, and sitting grim
Laughs.

With a voice of most exceeding peace
The Lord said ‘ Look no more ! ’ ”

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

MR. YARROW was orderly officer on the great day of the murder trial, to his very great disgust, for he would have liked to go into the court-house and hear the end of it, however much it might inflame him when the Chief Justice mishandled the evidence. The proceedings had lasted over a week, and the assessors, isolated during that period, had been bewildered and badgered by the Chief Justice when out of court until they were almost uncertain themselves as to the meaning of premeditation. Everard had acted throughout more as a counsel for the defence than the judge, and all the civil population had seethed with comment. Incident is so sparse in Exile that even the judicial scandals of the colony were a welcome diversion. At home, or even in a larger community, Yarrow would never have dreamed of spending an hour in a hot and confined space crowded with Arabs, however emphatic his opinions on the judgments might be.

They would always be emphatic because he was young and of a sanguine temperament. But he would have contented himself with round denunciation of Everard and his methods and gone off to more natural diversions.

As it was, he felt it an injury when one man after another got a chance to go into Reserve on the last day of the trial and "see if there were a chance of a good old row." He would have liked a fight—in mufti,—and had he happened to be on the spot and there were an uproar, and "I was not in uniform, sir! I had to look out for myself when the beggars got loose!"—who could blame him? He felt, like Hervey, that he wanted to use his strength. Five-and-twenty bottled up in stations like Exile is apt to find an outlet on such occasions as St. Patrick's Day and to wear newly-healed scars on its forehead.

Mr. Yarrow languished at his duty, while his brother officers got leave and left the mess a worse desert than the one beyond the Rocks. The garrison at Exile was a small one, the natural defences being almost impregnable; besides the Marine Artillery and the Marine Light Infantry there was only a detachment of the Camel Corps. Colonel Damer was still laid up with his cocktail fever, and the only other officer left in the Marine lines besides Mr. Yarrow was the senior captain, who was suffering from a genuine attack of dysentery, and was more concerned with the advisability of going into hospital than of providing company for his subaltern. He was not a cheerful companion, and he did not even want to discuss the last ponies that the

Remount Department had furnished for the Mounted Infantry.

By two o'clock Mr. Yarrow was reduced to wishing for an earthquake to break the hot monotony of the long bungalow and the sandy drilling ground, for his blood was quick in his veins ; at a quarter-past he almost prayed for something to happen ; and at half-past it came—a quick telephone message from the police barracks at Reserve that they wanted help, and following hard upon it an order from the Governor to send some of the Marines to guard the court-house. There was a disturbance in the bazaars, and a crowd was rushing into the road leading to the Cutting to mob the Chief Justice. No more details were forthcoming, but Yarrow's heart leapt. Everard must have discharged Haroun Ali, whatever verdict the jury had found, and the populace, knowing him guilty, was vowing vengeance on the Chief Justice.

“ Serve him right ! ” muttered Yarrow, as he gave the order for the men to fall in. “ And we've got to get the cur out of the mess ! ”

Nevertheless it was action, and he welcomed it, even in the midday heat of Exile. The men swung down the road to the Cutting, raising a cloud of dust, and seeming a curious match for the Rocks in their khaki. At this hour the shadowless sides of the volcanic range were much of the same toneless brown, and the moving mass of men might have been a detached portion endowed with motion.

At the Cutting came a sudden check. The passage had been closed to the public within the last hour, a notice to this effect having been posted early in the

morning, of which Yarrow had not heard. There was a guard at the gates, but the Cutting was not already blocked with men at work, and if Lieutenant Yarrow exerted his authority it was possible that he and his men might be allowed to go through under the circumstances. For a minute the young officer hesitated ; his own orders had been to go to Reserve, but he had not been told anything about the Cutting being closed, or that he was to take the shortest route at all costs. It lay at the back of his mind that they were going to the rescue of that brute Everard. Serve him right if the crowd did handle him roughly ! But he would look after his own skin—trust him ! And they would arrive in plenty of time.

He had halted his men where the Cutting lay on his right and the old road branched to the left. " We shall have to go round," he said to the sergeant, and then a brief order: " Company ! 'shun—left incline—quick march ! " and the column went swinging round the base of the Rocks. It was twenty minutes' extra, that was all—twenty minutes' more marching on the blistering road for the hot Marines—twenty minutes too late. But Mr. Yarrow's action was never called in question, nor was he blamed, since no one knew of that momentary wavering of the guard at the Cutting gates, and that he himself never quite faced the thought at the back of his mind. The Cutting was unfortunately closed for repairs, and the Marines had had to go the longer way round. The thing was a simple statement and unquestioned.

As the men marched into Reserve there was a stir in the air. It was not movement so much as the

sense of movement—a something breaking the ordinary drone of midday life and traffic. Instinctively the column quickened the pace, before the order passed the officer's lips. They were upon the straggling boundary of the city, a good half-mile yet from the centre of the town or from the court-house. But as they swung along the broad, hot road outside the Arab streets the vibration in the air increased until it was an absolute sound, a murmur of multitudes moving. The easy swip-swop of the soldiers' feet changed from the back and forwards creaking of boots into the impatience of the feet inside them. They would have run had there been the least encouragement, so contagious is excitement, though it was only the desire to be in for the scrum—to see the finish—to find out *what* was happening.

“Get on there, men. Quick march!” The body began to move as one unit, straight on to the goal.

The multitudinous hum of life that drew them on had not manifested itself until just after two o'clock when the court rose. It had been a protracted trial, and when the jury retired to consider their verdict the judge maintained that as premeditation had not been proved the prisoner could not be found guilty of murder. Now the code of Exile says that “Homicide committed wilfully is manslaughter. Manslaughter committed with premeditation or by lying in wait is murder,” and goes on to explain in what premeditation consists in phrases whose legal indirectness is enough to confuse a Solomon. There were as many opinions in Exile about premeditation

as there are in religious circles about predestination, and of this Everard had been clever enough to take advantage. Seven out of the eight assessors disagreed with him, the eighth being undecided, but the verdict was "Guilty of Murder."

Then the Chief Justice began to speak. His gift of words had never been more remarkable, and had the evidence been weaker he might almost have justified his decision to discharge the prisoner. Even as it was, he seized on the one weak spot, the question of premeditation, and allowed the accused the benefit of the doubt with an eloquence that rolled in swelling phrases.

Everard's speech was a really brilliant performance, whatever its flagrant injustice, and the white population present—not a few—acknowledged this later on. Only it failed to touch the native element at all. The grave, inscrutable Arab faces remained blank, simply listening and waiting for sentence of death. When the accused was discharged, despite the verdict of the jury, there was a little hush in court, a pause as if those listening were still waiting for more and did not realise what had happened, though the police were removing Haroun Ali from the dock. But it was not until the judge rose to leave the court that the first warning murmur rose, and the crowd surged up like an angry sea and threatened to overwhelm the police already in the building. Everard had given judgment almost with a smile, he was so full of contempt for the public opinion that futilely opposed his own cleverness, and he had so strong a belief in his own power; but at the growing murmur he hesitated for the first time,

turned back to look even as he was going out of court, and whitened. He had intended to leave the court-house at once. His car was waiting outside, for he had another work on hand,—the discovery of his wife's whereabouts. He was certain that she had not reached Health, even if she had attempted to escape him thither, and someone must have given her a sanctuary. During the days of the trial he had been hampered by his work, and had had little time to track her after her escape from his house, since he could not make it a public matter. But he had made inquiries, while maintaining to the world at large that she had gone away for a change, and was convinced that she was still in Reserve or its neighbourhood. While she held possession of the letter he knew neither rest nor ease, and he meant to track her down and deal with her as passion and revenge advised. But that warning mutter made him pause ; he could not leave the court-house until assured that the police had cleared the road for him. The natives who had been in court—they should never have been admitted !—might gather and wait for him outside. His fear was not very keen-edged as yet, but it sufficed to make him linger fatally until the police declared the road safe.

Meanwhile the court had been cleared, and the Arabs had been driven out of the court-house. They surged over the road and into the bazaars, where they met the bulk of the population waiting for news. The judgment and acquittal of Haroun Ali spread like wildfire, and a growing, muttering crowd began to throng in the narrow streets, moving always towards the court-house, where the Chief Justice still

waited. By the time a small body of police had arrived on the scene the roadway was packed, and the outer purlieus of the city were still emptying themselves into an area the centre of which was the spot where Edgar Everard was caught like a rat in a trap. The police struggled to hold back the crowd, to keep them at least peaceable and orderly ; but the excited murmur had grown to a full-throated yell for revenge, the demand which in a Western nation would have been for lynch law. Amongst the Arabs it threatened not only the single individual, but the whole structure of government, for it happened to be near the festival of the " Id Ramyan," and at such times a kind of religious mania surges over all Arab Exile and acts more dangerously than cocaine. It was when the police found themselves inadequate—with secret compliance, for they also were Arabs—that the telephone reported to Government House and Government House called up the Marines.—

It had been a hot morning, and Claudia Everard had little inducement to go up on the roof in search of air, which circulated better in the house. Nevertheless at one o'clock some restlessness or sense of danger took her up there to look down through the narrow loopholes of her refuge. There were more people in the streets, it seemed to her, than was usual at this hour. They stood about in groups, talking to each other, and did not pass to and fro about their business. She remembered that it was the last day of Haroun Ali's trial, and wondered if indeed that could be the cause. They were waiting for news—waiting for the verdict and

judgment. There would be plenty of talk down there soon. Or was it something to do with the "Id," some preliminary gathering? Her knowledge of Arab customs kept the festival more in her mind than in most Europeans' in Exile.

Her servants—Hervey's faithful staff—summoned her to lunch; but after her food she went back to the roof again about two o'clock, for now she was beginning to be aware that there was a hum in the air. Away over the roofs of the city she could see the big white buildings of the court-house and the gaol, but she could not see the road, and so she missed the pouring forth of the angry crowd after it became known that the murderer was acquitted. The first she knew of a rising was the steady stream of people that began to flow through the streets, like coloured ants beneath her, winding now here, now there, but always in the same direction, outwards from the bazaars. Here a building cut them off from her, there a narrow street gave her a glimpse of them again. She ran from side to side of the roof, trying to see more and more, and becoming aware of that hoarse sound of voices that was swelling up and bursting out of the streets and into the road which passed the court-house. One did not know that there were so many people in the city! They came up and up, as if the streets automatically opened doors to let them pass; they pressed closer and closer together until they were a living mass and a relentless tide. Claudia gazed at the dark stream fascinated. It would be awful to be down there in the heart of that surging humanity.

The sound of voices began to rise on the air, mingling with the sound of movement. The curious snarl of the Arabic words, rung from one to another, rose with a discordant menace and struck at Claudia's heart. She no longer fancied that it was the "Id" that caused it, though no doubt the religious excitement of the festival was further inflaming the people, who were light-headed from the long fast,—she knew in an instant what this outpouring of the populace meant, and where they were going. And with the next breath she had a picture of her husband's face, livid with fear, tossed hither and thither in the crowd. They would be at the court-house by this time waiting for him, and the police would be incapable of holding them back without the military. An overwhelming rush of pity, as for some stricken creature, welled up in her heart and flooded out all the horror and repulsion with which Edgar Everard had filled her. From the measureless height and breadth of her happy love she pitied him, as one safe in Paradise might pity an outcast on the earth, still groping in the darkness of garbage and filth. Poor, poor man! trapped in his own evil-doing, threatened with the monster of lynch law, which was the only thing that he feared. His very life appeared so poor and puny to Claudia that she wondered how he could take any enjoyment in it, full as it was of low passions and base desires and degraded aims. And yet he clung to it, and dreaded the very name of personal violence that menaced his physical existence. Everard had never feared him who could kill the soul, but he did very much fear him who could kill

the body, for his body circumscribed the world for him.

The wild crying in the streets rose to a sound of hoarse frenzy even as it passed further off. It was no more the voice of a people subjected to law and order, but the wild hordes of the desert, setting out to raid and kill. Would the military never come? They must have been called out by this time, unless the police were absolutely overpowered and unable even to send for help.

Claudia ran downstairs from the roof, with her heart ticking somewhere in her throat and an urgent sense of going to the rescue. She seized the heavy black kameese which she had found in her bedroom to disguise her if she went out; but her feet seemed to outrun her, and she was half-way to the entrance of the house before she got it over her head. There was no one in the lower part of the house that she could see—the servants had crowded on to some roof of their own quarters to watch the rising, or had gone to the door in the side street. There was no single soul in sight, for most of the women and children were safe within doors, and those of the lowest class who had ventured with the men were far ahead. She ran on and on, taking breathless turnings; but she did not come up with the multitude until the outmost streets of the city, and there she was caught in with the stragglers and pressed forward and onward with relentless force, a tall black shrouded figure holding her kameese safely over her head and face and unrecognisable. She was only one more Arab woman in the heart of the motley crowd, carried along by its impetus, and

feeling choked by the strange scent and sight of it.

In a minute, as it seemed to her, the whole mass in which she was wedged was flung out of the last narrow alley into the broader road running to the Cutting. All round her were excited cries, deafening her—all about her that stifling scent of dried woods and spices,—and in front and behind the awakened beautiful faces of the men, the shrouded heads of the women. It struck her that she had never seen this people really alive before. The Oriental reserve was gone from them as if they had lifted a veil, and the dark, pale features worked with excitement, the large eyes burnt, the parted lips showed the eager teeth. They looked as if they would tear and torture and slay without mercy. And through it all she seemed to see her husband's face of livid fear.

There was some organisation even yet in the crowd, and some leadership, for she perceived a purpose in this steady forward movement. The people massed themselves up and down the road, a hundred yards on this side of the court-house, a hundred yards on that, surging up behind it to cut off a way of escape, forming a solid wall in front. If the soldiers came now they must charge upon a packed mass of humanity, for there was no parting it. Away in front, in the little open space before the court-house doors, the police were struggling, borne back and back by the relentless people, who were using them as a lever to force the very doors. And suddenly out of the crowd of all other faces Claudia saw Said's face, beautiful exceedingly, with

the beauty of battle and wrath and wild justice. He was one of the leaders, and was directing the assault. She felt the crowd surge forward, and in her mind was the instinct to reach him and appeal to him—a half-framed thought that was not definite purpose.

She could not see the defeat of the police or the doors of that mock court of justice broken in, but that the crowd had found a victim on which to vent their hate she knew from the din that arose in front. She put her hands up to her ears in horror to shut out a shriek she might recognise ; but it was not Everard, it was Haroun Ali the murderer, and his acquittal availed him little. Claudia was carried forward in the wake of that assassination and had almost reached Said ; she had gathered her voice to cry to him when for a minute the ranks in front of her loosened for a forward rush and she saw the thing she had been seeing in her mind—the livid face of her husband with his head bent down as he ran hither and thither trying to escape. The sight was too horrible—it was no longer a man, it was terror incarnate. The crowd's very yell changed to a mockery of laughter as it chased and worried him.

Claudia had reached the front ranks of the people. Whether her intense desire had brought her there or some inhuman strength she did not know, but in the same moment that she saw Everard she saw the long emaciated figure of Stanley Murgatroyd fighting desperately. She reached him first, and, indifferent that she betrayed herself, cried out to him in English, " We must save him ; Stanley, we must

save him ! ” and turning in the path of the oncoming mob for a moment she stood at bay between Everard and the death he gibbered at. Then the crowd closed over her, as over an unconsidered atom. It trampled and struck with unheeding feet in its desire to get at that running figure. He was down also—worse, he was in their hands, his shrieking voice drowned in the deep volume of their cry for real justice at last.

Stanley Murgatroyd had turned at the sound of the voice that reached him, and, knowing it death, had let the crowd drive him back, tripping and almost falling over the body of the woman he sought. His long arms closed round her and he crouched above her, shielding what life might remain to her with his own. So the first rush went past ; but Claudia’s cry had reached other ears besides Murgatroyd’s, and as he raised his bruised and bleeding head he looked up into the fierce beautiful face of the young Arab whom he had seen in her house. He uttered a cry of mingled suspicion and jealousy, and flung out his arm blindly to thrust Said from her, stretching his gaunt frame between them. The crowd had loosened and was rushing up the road on its hideous vengeance, for behind it came the solid tramp of the Marines, and it would not be baulked of its prey. There was the warning of a volley—blank ammunition as yet—and Said swooped like a hawk to gather Claudia’s helpless body from the ground ; but the Crown prosecutor was in his way. With his left hand he drew the long knife from his belt and thrust it under Murgatroyd’s arm . . . then as the body dropped

sideways he lifted Claudia and dragged her out of the way of the soldiers.

“Ya Sitt lives,” he said, though a lesser instinct would have seen no movement in that crushed body. “A dog’s life has gone for hers—God is great!”

The Marines fixed bayonets and charged. . . .

THE END.

AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

Accn. No.....

1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.